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Primitive Christianity:

OR,
A PLAIN, FRIENDLY
T R E A T I S E
TO REVIVE
A true Spirit of RELIGION.

IN FOUR PARTS.

The FIRST sheweth the Truth and Importance of
Virtue and Religion in general.

The SECOND containeth Thoughts on the Character,
Station, and Duty of the Ministers of Christ, &c.

The THIRD sheweth the Duty of all Christian People
towards their Ministers, &c. &c.

The FOURTH containeth a Discourse, by way of Dia-
logue, on the following moral and religious Sub-
jects.

DIALOGUE I. The Power of
God, and the Agency of his Pro-
vidence, not inconsistent with
human Liberty.

II. Human Agency proved and de-
fended by Reason and Revelation.

III. The Doctrine of Original

Corruption no Scripture Doctrine,
consequently of no weight against
human Liberty.

IV. Describeth the Faith and
Practice of a rational and sincere
Christian, and the Grounds of
his future Acceptance.

Humbly addressed to all well-disposed Christian
Ministers and People.

By a sincere Friend to Rational Religion.

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M D C C L X V I.



The P R E F A C E.

I MAKE no doubt but what my friends, those in particular who are best acquainted with me, and have given encouragement to the publishing this work, will readily make all candid allowances for the many imperfections and inaccuracies with which it abounds:

And notwithstanding it is a feeble attempt, I can sincerely say, it is the best that I am at present able to make ; and made with no other design than to revive and promote true rational Christianity.

If it should be alledged, that it is a superfluous piece, and that, after so many excellent pieces of this kind, it is giving the public unnecessary trouble and expence ; if it be so, it is not the first superfluous piece that has been wrote, nor the only worthless
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and unnecessary book the public have been pestered with.—As to the expence, the author thinks he shall have greater occasion to complain than the public.—However, he flatters himself, that it will be of some real service, and answer the end he proposes,—viz. the honour of God, the credit of religion, and the happiness of men; which will compensate for the labour and expence attending it: and he humbly begs it may be read with candor and impartiality, and that his readers will give encouragement to it, so far as it is agreeable to truth: which will greatly oblige their humble servant,

THE AUTHOR.



A

FRIENDLY TREATISE

TO REVIVE

PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY.

PART THE FIRST.

Shewing the Truth and Importance of
Religion and Virtue in general.

RELIGION is a serious concern,
and of the utmost importance to every
man that can discern the fitness and suitable-
ness of religious principles; and how well
adapted they are to promote the highest hap-
piness of intelligent beings, whose active
powers are awake and able to judge of the
good religion is productive of, and can view
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the last bad consequences which will follow the want of it.—Infidelity and libertinism cannot shake the foundation of religion, nor the careless and wicked lives of its professors, make it the less important.—Religion is important, independant of the vain conceits of men: and the many different contentions and debates about religion, is so far from being a proof of its weakness, that it only shews the importance of it; just as the many law-suits about property, prove the value of what is contended for. And as we are made for religion, we must pursue that which makes for it: for if we neglect to improve ourselves in religious knowledge, we shall certainly neglect one great end of our being, and christianity will not have its grand end answered, if we are not made religious by it. But if christianity produces in us the fruits of true holiness, and we are sincerely virtuous and benevolent by it, we shall be truly and really happy.—But if we are destitute of religion and real goodness, we shall as certainly be destitute of real happiness: for religion and virtue are connected with happiness; and if we advance in the one, we shall enjoy the other
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in a greater degree, and more durable will the happiness be : but if we decrease in virtue, we shall have our happiness in the same proportion diminished. This is a truth which reason and revelation teach us : and yet either for want of a sincere love of the truth, or because some present sensible good gains the ascendant in the mind, it is apparent that whatever the cause may be, men spare but little time and labour to make any progress in religion and virtue ; when at the same time it is evident, they spare no cost to purchase a transitory enjoyment.—It must surely be matter of serious lamentation to all well disposed persons, and more particularly to the faithful ministers of the gospel, to observe a mere formal profession of religion among the disciples of Christ, instead of sincere piety to the all-seeing God : injustice, uncharitableness, revenge and cruelty ; instead of honesty, meekness, universal charity and benevolence : intemperance, and debaucheries ; instead of sobriety, chastity, and a regular government of the appetites and passions. But if we view the tendency of our being, it will appear self evident to us, that we were not framed and

designed for the indulgence of these selfish sensual appetites : all animal gratifications being so far wrong and unreasonable, as they have any tendency to destroy the moral and religious powers. But on the contrary, the reason of things, and the whole tenor of Scripture, jointly agree, in pointing out the duty and happiness of intelligent beings ; which undeniably consists in this, that we take all possible pains to get above every corrupt appetite and passion, and make continual improvements in moral perfection ; to add to our faith, virtue—to grow in grace—and to be constant in the practice of religious well doing. And we are exhorted, to “ live and sow, (not to the flesh) but to the “ spirit. And to set our affections, not on “ things below, but on things which are “ above ;” that is, to be more solicitous and zealous in the pursuit of our eternal, than any temporal concerns. Now if man is a rational creature, and capable of enjoying pleasures of a rational kind, flowing from the practice of virtue and well governed affections ; there will then be force, propriety and consistency, in those directions of Scripture, where he is exhorted to *mortify his members*

bers which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affections, evil concupiscence and covetousness, which is idolatry; for which things sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience. And St. Paul in another place says, the night is far spent, the day is at hand; for which reason he exhorts us, to cast off the works of darkness: "to cast off such intemperate
"works of the flesh, as rioting, drunken-
"ness, chambering, and wantonness; strife
"and envying; and to make no provision
"for the flesh, to fulfil the lust thereof.—
"But rather, or instead of which, be sober,
"sedate, and temperate; and put on the ar-
"mour of light.—Walk honestly as in the
"day; and put on the Lord Jesus Christ."
 —Again, the same apostle exhorts, that no corrupt communication should proceed out of the mouth; and let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, (says he) be put away from you, with all malice.—From hence, we might query, or ask ourselves; what has been our former behaviour? what have we done? how have we managed our appetites? and how have we acted towards others? have

we, or have we not complied with the rules of holy Scripture just recited? have we been a prey, or dupe to our appetites? or have we obtained a command and dominion over them? and have been moving on towards moral perfection, and have acquired a true virtuous disposition of mind, and an habitual firmness, and magnanimity of soul? or have we not examined ourselves upon these points of such vast importance, on which our future and eternal happiness depends? If we have not, 'tis certain (whatever we have pretended to) we have forgot the principal business, for which we were sent into the world, and not considered our main interest; and if we continue in a supine indolence, with respect to our grand concern, we shall find ourselves deprived at last of the greatest happiness our nature is capable of, and shall have nothing to expect but a state of dreadful misery in proportion to what we have really deserved.—Perhaps some may think, that they are the *children of light*, and that they have *put on the Lord Jesus Christ*, by believing, or making a profession of christianity; and that upon this account, they suppose their future peace and happiness secure;

cure; while at the same time, they are regardless of the moral and religious life: but I should think it indisputable, that *casting off*, and *putting on* (in the apostle's language) necessarily signifies something more than a bare belief, or mere profession.—Indeed, for men to separate the profession of religion, from the practice of holiness and righteousness; is no less than stripping religion of its natural fruits, and turning it into hypocrisy, corrupting, depraving, and destroying integrity, and the religious state of the mind: for without the virtues of justice, honesty, temperance, goodness and mercy, the very name of religion must dwindle into a mere contemptible shadow. The true beauty and real excellency of a christian, is not in any of the external ornaments, but 'tis in the goodness and purity of the mind.—The beauty of the body (says Clemens of Alexandria; Pædag. lib. iii. c. 11. p. 248) “ consists in a good complexion, and in apt symmetry and proportion of its parts:—But the greatest beauty in the world is that of the soul, when 'tis adorned with the Holy Spirit and the excellent graces of it, justice, prudence, fortitude, temperance, the love of

goodness and modesty, which is the brightest and most lovely ornament that the eye of man can behold.—It is not (says he, *ibid.* c. ii. p. 216.) the exterior aspect of the man that is to be regarded: but the mind that is to be furnished and adorned with goodness and virtue.”——To this we may add, what an inspired apostle has said; that *the kingdom of God (or true religion) is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.*—And in another place, he says: *Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.*

If (then) in the primitive christians, purity and goodness of the mind was the best and most excellent accomplishment; what is the reason, that modern christians prefer mere trifling and fading amusements before it?—For if there be (as most certain there is) beauty, merit, true worth, and excellency in moral qualifications, we should in all reasonable views employ our utmost endeavours to gain such valuable endowments. And
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if an apostle of Christ has assured us, that the kingdom of God consists in righteousness and peace, why should we substitute something else in the room of it? And if the things which are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report, should be the chief objects of our thoughts, 'tis certainly our duty to reduce to practise the moral virtues that we think upon. For thinking without acting, is like faith, without works.—'Tis true, we must first think, before we can see any fitness and beauty in morality and religion: but then we must act in conformity to morality and religion before we can be moral or religious persons. So that as reasonable beings we are obliged to think right, and to act well in consequence of it, which latter is the better part. Or in the words of the great poet;

“ Take Nature's path, and mad Opinion's leave;
All states can reach it, and all heads conceive;
Obvious her goods, in no extream they dwell;
There needs but thinking right, and acting well.”

And wise Solomon advises us to *ponder the path of our feet, that all our ways may be established*. Which must imply (at least) that we should with all seriousness consider, and deliberately muse and think upon every
step

step we take, in our moral and religious behaviour and conduct. Or in other words, to weigh in our minds the consequence of our actions, so as to be satisfied they tend to the perfection and happiness of our being. For if a false step does involve us into danger and difficulty, it must be of moment to consider what other step will keep us from that danger.—If indeed we had no dangers nor difficulties—no snares nor temptations—no bias on our minds, nor any passions or inclinations to mislead us into the benighted paths of error and wickedness; we should want no motives laid before us to engage us to a serious consideration of the path of our feet. But since 'tis not so happy a stage we are on—since we are not free from danger and temptation—we must not free ourselves from a careful thought; we must give constant attention to the temper of our minds and the tenor of our conversation, that they may produce true virtue and religion. For there is nothing of higher importance to us than our moral and religious conduct; and it ought therefore to be the highest in our esteem. For since the most compleat and unblemished character, is not free from weakness

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and error; it must require labour and diligence to obtain it; and when obtained, to preserve it. What then can be of greater importance to us, than well to examine and consider into our moral character and our improvements in virtue and religion? nay without it, it is hardly possible to be religious, at least to any good purpose. For we are exhorted to *search the Scriptures*—to *examine ourselves, whether we are in the faith*—and to *try the spirits, whether they are of God*—which cannot be done, to answer any good end, without mature consideration. For if we do not consider and think for ourselves, we may as easily be led into error, as into truth. And besides, actions moral or religious, done without design, as being merely accidental, are not, nor cannot be, of the same worth and merit, as when they result from choice and design—I say (choice and design) because if there be any worth and beauty in good morals, or any demerit and deformity in bad ones, there must be choice and intention. That there is a difference between moral good and evil, is evident, and can never be blended together and made one and the same—the same difference

difference is and must remain, as there is between light and darkness ; bitter and sweet. —And the boasted skill and criticism of unbelievers, and the variable opinions, fancies, and imaginations of wicked men, can never change the real unalterable difference of things. Unbelievers,—free-thinkers,—and free-talkers—dissolute—wanton—licentious—debauched men (I know not what to call them) dissolvers of virtue and morality, will say ; There is no real difference in good and evil : and that 'tis only imagination, or the ideas of the mind.—But if there be no difference, how came we to have such ideas ? Not only good, but wicked men have such ideas as to discern between right and wrong.—“ For there is no man (says Dr. Clarke) so vile and desperate, who commits at any time a murder and robbery, with the most unrelenting mind, but would choose, if such a thing could be proposed to him, to obtain all the same profit and advantage whatsoever it be that he aims at, without committing the crime, rather than with it : even though he was to go unpunished for committing the crime.”——If this be the voice of Nature——If men that
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are wicked, profane, and debauched, in their corrupt and depraved state, can see and approve of that which is good, and condemn that which is vile and odious ; this not only plainly evinces, that the mind of man is such as unavoidably acknowledges a natural difference between good and evil ; but that the Deity has not left himself without a witness, by stamping such ideas and consciousness in the frame of human nature. And as he has made it impossible for us to exercise our faculties according to the order of nature, without being struck with a sense of moral goodness ; this makes it evident, that the gracious Author of our beings has been very kind and indulgent to us, and he hath also employed various methods of his providence to preserve and keep alive in the minds of men a deep and fixed sense of moral piety, virtue, and goodness : yet nevertheless, 'tis shocking to relate, that some of the most striking and alarming providences of God, are soon forgot, or very little attended to.—Nay, what bounds are there settled either in nature or revelation, that thoughtless, lewd, wicked men, will not break through, or run over and tread down ?

what

—what inventions, and doctrines, will they find out to extinguish, or obscure, corrupt, deface, confound, or perplex the dictates of natural conscience concerning virtue and vice?—They love darkness, rather than light—they prefer the momentary pleasures of sin, to the manly and rational pleasures of religion. And the frequent repeated sensual, vicious pleasures, will clog and overload the mind, blunt the edge, and jade the appetite; and will surely end in shame, confusion, and remorse. But quite the reverse are the pleasures of religion; they are pure and unmixed—independant and free—free from all jealousies—uneasy terrors and disquieting suspicions—and free from the foreboding apprehensions of death and judgment—and they are durable and abiding pleasures, they will continue and abide with us for ever—and they will be our sure friend and companion—they will accompany us to the most retired places—and be with us, when all earthly friends and enjoyments leave and desert us.—The ways of religion are described (Prov. iii. 17, 18.) as *ways of pleasantness, and all her paths as peace—she is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her,*
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and happy is every one that retaineth her.—

But no man can say this of the pleasures of sin ; no, for (Heb. xi. 25.) *the pleasures of sin are but for a season* ; the season time is short, and when this short span of time is at an end, it must be to every one a gloomy circumstance, that he has laid up treasures for himself, and is not rich towards God. And (Luke xii. 21.) he that is not rich in virtue and good works, *is not rich towards God* ; but is (Rev. iii. 17.) *poor, blind, wretched and miserable* : and why ? the reason is evident, because this life is our seed time, and time of trial : the life which succeeds to it, is our harvest and state of rest. We now are to make provision for our after state—to be rich in virtue and holiness, in order to be made partakers of immortal glory, honour, and felicity. Christians must therefore now shine in good morals and in the duties of christianity—they must be exemplary in life and conversation. Which leads me to consider more particularly,

First : To revive a true spirit of religion. He that is a christian (of whatsoever denomination) must not only strictly regard the
moral

moral fitness and difference of things, but must also be possessed with candor and meekness of mind. This is what all christians are frequently and earnestly exhorted to in the sacred pages of Scripture—*Who is a wise man, saith St. James (ch. iii. 13.) and endued with knowledge amongst you : let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom*—He that is so wise, so thoughtful, and so considerate, as to make a profession of the christian religion—to become a christian and a disciple of Christ, must shew out of a good (or sober, decent, and becoming) conversation his works—his works of piety and virtue—his works of charity, or acts of benevolence—and his works, or actions in general, must all spring from a mind, tempered with meekness of wisdom.—*The fruit of the Spirit* is said to be *meekness*, (Gal. v. 23.) and we are exhorted to walk with all lowliness and meekness—to put on meekness and long suffering—and to follow after love and meekness.—All which evidently shews, that this virtue of meekness is not only absolutely necessary, but likewise highly ornamental in the character of a christian. This
virtue

virtue we should put on, and always carry about with us—for it will not only prepare us to submit and yield with patience to the disposals of the all-wise sovereign providence of God here, but will also fit and make us meet for the peaceful, quiet, and undisturbed regions of bliss and glory hereafter. And it must be evident, that the contrary and opposite spirit to that of meekness; namely, a fretful, timorous, fierce, revengeful, and turbulent disposition; is entirely and utterly inconsistent with the characters of christians: contrary to the intention of religion; and very destructive of the advantages naturally arising from it: and contrary to the positive and express declarations of Christ, and his apostles. St. Paul describes the temper of mind which christians should have, to be (Col. iii. 12, 15.) mercy, humility, kindness, meekness, long-suffering, forbearance, forgiveness, charity, and peaceableness.—And St. James tells us (James iii. 17.) that *the wisdom which is from above, is first pure, then peaceable, gentle and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits.* And in another place he assures us (ibid. ii. 13.) that the man shall

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have judgment without mercy, who hath shewed no mercy. And that great and admirable clemency, patience, long-suffering, and meekness, which the supreme Father and Governor of the universe, exercises towards his creatures, should lead and teach men to imitate and conform (in all their behaviour as near as they can) to the excellent pattern and conduct of heaven. "To be in our proportion indulgent, meek, patient, and condescending to all, and to be peaceable and merciful to those who injure and offend us." Do we not stand in want of mercy and kindness from each other? Do we not all hope to meet with merciful dealings; and to be treated with much tenderness and meekness by our heavenly Father? Should not we then, who are partakers of the same wants, and partners of the same hope, be possessed with kindness and meekness, and ready to shew mercy? Be ye (saith the apostle, Eph. iv. 32.) *kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven you; be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children.* And that amiable example of meekness and gentleness,

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which

which our Saviour has also given us in his whole behaviour and conversation, should teach us to be like minded——to be of the same temper, and to follow his steps: for he has left us an example, and he himself earnestly calls upon us to imitate him (Matt. xi. 29.) *Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart. I have given you,* saith he upon another occasion (John xiii. 15, 16.) *an example, that ye should do, as I have done to you. Verily, verily I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his Lord.* If any man, saith St. John (1 John, ii. 6.) *abides in him, he ought also so to walk, even as he walked.*——And this temper of mind we are now considering and recommending, will still appear to be necessary, and more absolutely so in matters of religion.——For since different persuasions and opinions are unavoidable, except men will be hypocrites, 'tis therefore very imperious to impose upon others, and not allow them the like liberty we ourselves chuse: we should rather, nay we ought, and we must, if we pay any regard to reason and Scripture, study to preserve charity and candor towards those that differ from us; to bear with one ano-

ther's weakness and infirmities ; and to treat those meekly and kindly, who do not think as we do.—For we are exhorted to instruct those that oppose themselves with meekness—either those, that oppose the truth, or those that may chance to differ from us, are to be reclaimed and instructed with meekness.—And St. Peter (1 Peter, iii. 4.) says, that *a meek and quiet spirit, in the sight of God, is of great price*—'tis of great value, lovely, and of good report, —approved of men, and acceptable to God. —But the contrary temper must be hateful to man, and offensive to God.—The want of this spirit of meekness, candor and forbearance, has produced so many dreadful scenes of persecution, attended with all sorts of barbarity and cruelty, in the christian world.—And too near akin to this, is the prevalent and reigning disposition and spirit, among many of our brethren ; who condemn and censure all that differ from them —send and doom all to eternal destruction, for no other reason, but because they differ from them in mere points of speculative belief.—Hard indeed ! severe and unchristian is the censure ! What has any man, or
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set of men, to do with judging or affigning the future state of others ? Do they think that the righteous Judge of the world, will not judge righteous judgment ? or have they authority to take God's work out of his hands ? Or is it not soon enough to have the sentence passed at the final period ? at the day appointed for the world to be judged in righteousness ? We are exhorted to judge nothing before that time—for there is one law-giver, who is able to save, and to destroy ; who art thou that judgest another ?—to his own master, he must stand or fall. May we therefore all endeavour more after that noble temper which was in our blessed Saviour : *Father, (saith he) forgive them, for they know not what spirit they are of.* And this benevolent forgiving temper, is what christianity lays a great stress upon, and is in a peculiar manner its own reward ; “ the merciful man (saith Solomon) doth good to his own soul.” And to be possessed with candor, meekness, gentleness, peaceableness and charity, is reasonable and becoming every christian ; and is admirably calculated to promote the general interest of the christian cause. “ For it would (saith an excel-

lent author) much better become us, and be more for the advantage of common christianity, to commiserate our mutual ignorance, and endeavour to remove it by all the gentle and peaceable methods of reason and persuasion."——In a word ; no man can be so depraved and lost to all sense of goodness, as not to admire and approve the forgiving benevolent temper ; and hate the cruel, unforgiving one. And altho' we are exhorted to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints—and to give a reason of the hope that is in us ; we are to do it in fear and meekness, and to keep the unity of the spirit, in the bonds of peace—and we should always let that excellent saying be in our minds, " I am a man, and I esteem nothing foreign to me which is of kin to humanity." But to proceed, Secondly.

Do atheism and immorality make a rapid progress in the world ? do the superstitious and enthusiast cry aloud and spare not ? and is the state of christianity and true religion at a low ebb, and dwindling away ? What then is to be done, to revive truth and virtue ? Are men who profess the true principles of christianity to be led away and charm-
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ed with the whistling of a name? Should they not rather make a candid scrutiny into the great doctrines of christianity, and strictly adhere to those plain truths which are revealed, and to the duties enjoined—" by taking a view of the great evidences and principles of natural and revealed religion—the being and providence of God—the difference of moral good and evil—the immortality of the soul—future rewards and punishments—and the strict rules and precepts of the gospel, for the government of our actions and lives, for the abstaining from all vice and wickedness, and the practice of universal piety and virtue."——I say, a serious review of these great and important truths, may be a means to revive a spirit of religion.——" And if we consider the christian revelation in particular, it will appear in every branch of it, highly reasonable and becoming the wisdom and goodness of the supreme Deity; and admirably well contrived to promote piety and holiness in the world." In particular, the exceeding great and precious promises of a future inheritance, the everlasting kingdom, the crown of life, the future building of God,

an house not made with hands eternal in the heavens ; are well adapted to promote holiness of life, and a likeness to the moral perfections of God. That by these (saith the apostle) you might be made partakers of the divine nature.—“ That faith, which is now required of us as christians under the gospel, concerning the future and invisible state ; is not only a general and firm persuasion and full conviction of the truth of God’s mercy and readiness to reward those who diligently seek, serve, and obey him ; but also a full and implicit faith of another and future life after death ; (John v. 28, 29.) “ of a resurrection to life, to those that have done good ; and a resurrection to damnation, to those who have done evil.”—“ This future state (says a great writer) of rewards and punishments, the christian faith sets before us, and gives us as full assurance of, as if we now heard our Saviour’s voice, and saw him coming in the clouds with power and great glory : so that we live and act by it, as men who have no doubt concerning it ; but reckon upon it as most certain and infallible : and though it may now be at many ages distance ; will most assuredly come,

come, and come home to us, and make us either happy or miserable, according as our works have been." Oh ! what a glorious, welcome, and happy day, will this day of judgment and retribution be, to the righteous ? " the righteous shall then inherit glory." They shall then see, to their inexpressible joy, the great Saviour and judge of the world—the Son of the eternal God appear in great splendor and glory, who will bid them come, as blessed of his Father, and inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world. How glorious will be our judge, both in the dignity of his person, and the splendor of his appearance ! the only begotten of the Father ! the most expressive brightness of his glory ! surrounded with ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousand of thousands of the angelic host, forming his retinue, and singing a new song, saying, " Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and honour, and glory, and blessing." What a wonderful assembly must be that, which is to consist of the whole human race ! with what an endless variety of objects, sights, and characters, will it present us ! with what
pleasing

pleasing astonishment shall we see the numberless dead awakened by the voice of the archangel's trumpet, and instantly assuming a glorious, spiritual, incorruptible body. With what seriousness of attention, and how often should we view this awful day?—There is none so great, nor any one so small, of the human race, but what will be summoned to make their appearance there.—And what an interesting, all glorious, and happy day will it be, to every one who has wisely, during the day of grace, employed his thoughts and meditations upon this amazing scene, so that they have effectually influenced his moral and religious conduct, and thereby he has secured the extraordinary favour of having his name written in the Lamb's book of life.—But oh! what an inexpressible, miserable, sorrowful, heart-melting, and heart-throbbing day will it be, to the impenitent, obdurate, and unrelenting sinner? He may call for the rocks and mountains to hide him from the wrath of the judge; but all in vain. Then he will “see the heavens melting into one continual stream and boundless ocean of liquid fire, mountains tottering—the sea itself in flames
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—all nature shaking to her inmost center—
 and all that has been thought most permanent and stable upon this terrestrial globe, crackling into ruins like a broken potsherd.—
 Can we then think upon, and view these awful scenes? can we believe the future state of rewards and punishments, and at the same time not live and act here, as those who must give an account of ourselves hereafter?—And that we might now have a more steady persuasion, and firm and fixed faith of a life to come, and of the happiness of the righteous and faithful, the Scriptures often represent to us the invisible future glories, and speak of them, as if it were now in our view and possession.—For we are said even now to be quickened together with Christ—to be saved by grace—to be raised up together, and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.—’Tis said of Moses, that he had respect to the recompence of the reward, and endured the wrath of king Pharoah, as seeing him who is invisible:—the invisible one he beheld by faith; and for the sake of those promises of future good things, which God had made, he could forego his present ease and pleasure.

sure. And the apostle, in this 11th chap. to the Hebrews, sets before christians the example of obedience, self-denial, and faith, of some of the most eminent and distinguished persons under the Old Testament.—And from these examples, he draws an inference, and exhorts christians not to draw back from the hope set before them in the gospel——“Cast not away (saith he) therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward”—and again, “hold fast the profession of faith without wavering, for he is faithful that promised.” Which leads me to observe, Thirdly,

That if we would grow and abound in grace, and every good work, and increase in the faith of the gospel, we must endeavour to be possessed with the virtue of patience,—“for ye (saith the apostle) have need of patience;”—ye christians have need of patience; and why? the reason is evident; because we are not yet in heaven.—We now live in hope and by faith, and not by sight—we are now in a state of adversity, trial and discipline—in a state, where the foundation must be laid for an after state of happiness.—And while we are in this state,

state, on our journey, and travelling to heaven and happiness, we must not expect to be wholly delivered and exempted from the various difficulties and disappointments incident to human life.—We must therefore patiently wait for the promised inheritance: we must hold on, and out to the end; and be faithful unto death, and then we are to have (as a recompence) a crown of life.—“Be not (saith the apostle, and author to the Hebrews) slothful, but followers of them, who through faith and patience, inherit the promises”—The apostle there puts together and joins patience, with faith, as equally necessary to the enjoyment of a future life; and declares it to be the virtue the saints were possessed with, and by which they attained to the inheritance of the promises.—And what St. James says of it, is very expressive, “Let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.” From hence we may conclude, that under proper occasions for the trial and exercise of this virtue of patience, we must labour to be possessed with it. For if it be not attained to, something will be wanting; or we shall be destitute of

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something essentially necessary to the integrity, perfection, or happiness, of the christian state. Besides, patience, which is connected with tranquillity and contentedness, is not only necessary to the christian character, but 'tis also a duty we owe to the almighty power, wisdom, and goodness of the supreme Deity ; who has placed us in this world, to try our virtues ; to prove us, to know whether we will keep his commandments, or no. And therefore, all kinds of murmurings against the dispensations and ways of providence, must be entirely repugnant to the virtue of patience. And altho' we cannot fathom, or penetrate the design of providence, in all his visitations to men ; yet nevertheless, we may infer from the strokes of wisdom and benevolence in every part of the creation, that no event is appointed, or can befall us, without that counsel and wisdom which directs and conducts all for the best upon the whole : in particular, that afflictions do not arise out of the dust, nor trouble spring out of the ground ; but are ordered by the all-wise disposing hand of providence, with a kind intention to promote the real advantage of
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all men, to bring them to a serious consideration of their ways, to produce in them the fruits of holiness and righteousness, that they might be happy in the end. For the apostle declares, "that whom the Lord loveth, he rebuketh; and chasteneth and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth"—and therefore we ought not to despise the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when he rebuketh: for we are assured that all things shall work together for good to them that love him. But then we should carefully distinguish between the afflictions directed by the hand of providence, and those we bring upon ourselves through intemperance and lust. Indeed, the best are not to hope for compleat happiness in this state; the righteous and the wicked men have their uneasinesses here; and if so, what can the slaves of vice, and folly expect?—But if upon examination, virtue appears conducive to our highest perfection and happiness; if it tends to secure the favour of almighty God, we should not on any consideration suffer the prospects of temporary pleasures to retard the vigorous endeavours of our virtuous purposes.—And we must always remember, that by custom
and

and habit, the most difficult duties will become easy—for 'tis our own irresolution that enfeebles and fetters the mind—that so unhappily betrays us into temptation, and unmans us for the discharge of our duty. And therefore the weakness and infirmities of our own minds, and the many trials and temptations in this imperfect state, demand our serious consideration, that we may have habitual resolution and strength of mind to continue in the uniform practice of virtue, and daily increase in moral perfection, seeking after glory, honour, and immortality—pursuing the end of faith, the salvation of our souls. And if, by direction and appointment of providence, our present life be mixed with pains and sorrows, difficulties and disappointments—we should cultivate hope and patience, which the apostle to the Romans joins together as inseparable companions—“ We (saith the apostle) are saved by hope”—but hope that is seen is not hope.—For what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?—But if we hope for what we see not, then do we with patience wait for it. And another apostle exhorts christians to patience, from the example of the husbandman,

bandman, who (saith he) “ waiteth for the
 “ precious fruits of the earth, and hath long
 “ patience for it.—Be ye also patient—sta-
 “ blish your hearts, for the coming of the
 “ Lord draweth nigh. Grudge not one
 “ against another, brethren, lest ye be
 “ condemned : behold, the judge standeth
 “ before the door. Take, my brethren,
 “ the prophets, who have spoken in the
 “ name of the Lord, for an example of
 “ suffering affliction, and of patience.”

And again ; “ behold we count them happy
 “ which endure”—they that can patiently
 endure, or bear the sufferings and afflictions
 of the world, are happy in their temper.
Ye (saith the apostle) have heard of the pa-
tience of Job, and have seen—seen the end of the
Lord,—that the Lord is very pitiful, and of
tender mercy. Nothing can be conceived to
 be a greater encouragement, or a stronger
 excitement to the duty of patience, than a
 firm persuasion that the Deity is essentially
 merciful, and of tender regard towards his
 creatures. Nor can any thing be more inju-
 rious to the character of God, nor more de-
 structive of religion, than to represent the
 supreme author and governor of the world,

as having no pity, partial, and as originally of himself merciless and cruel : for this destroys the very first principles of religion, and cuts up all notions of resignation and careful obedience. Nay, 'tis entirely contrary to reason, and the common apprehensions we can but have of God, and inconsistent with the express language of Scripture : for the Father is represented as essentially merciful. *The Father himself* (saith our Saviour to his disciples) *loveth you*—and Christ assured his disciples, “ that he
 “ would not leave them comfortless ;—that
 “ when he departed, and was personally absent from them, he would send them
 “ another Comforter—and would pray the
 “ Father for them.” And he is said to be
 “ able to save to the uttermost, who come
 “ unto God by him, seeing he (that is
 “ Christ) ever liveth to make intercession
 “ for them.”—Were our minds habitually impressed with a just sense of the love and propitioufness of the Father Almighty, and of the benevolence of the Son, and of his readiness to plead and intreat the Father on our behalf, that he would be kind in the disposals of his providence towards us,—
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there could be no sufficient cause for us to despair under any of the trials of human life.—Is it not rather a sufficient cause for trust and confidence in the favour of God, and of resolution, magnanimity, and patience, in the discharge of every duty,—since there can be no circumstance, no trial nor difficulty we can be brought under, but what is in the view and presence of the omnipotent creator and preserver of all things.—And if we add to this, the strength of hope, firmness of faith, the serene and chearful soul, and the virtue of patience, with which the first and primitive Christians were possessed, under the sharpest trials and severest sufferings; we from hence might be led to imitate the virtues of those noble heroes, and rejoice that our lot is cast in more pleasant places.—*Wherefore, seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.*—Which God of his mercy grant, through the one Mediator Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

PART THE SECOND.

CONTAINING,

Thoughts on the Character, Station, and
Duty of the Ministers of CHRIST, &c.

IT has been allowed to be of the last importance to man, that he should know himself.—For men must know themselves, before they can sustain their respective characters with dignity and honour.—And scarcely can any man be insensible of a certain fitness of behaviour, which is proper to every station, character, and condition of life.—Can it then be denied to be a less important, or a less necessary branch of duty to every minister of Christ, to know himself, his station, and business; and adorn his profession by an agreeable deportment? For can it be ever expected, that the primitive christian spirit can be revived without it?—It is evident that man was made for serious thinking, and for uniform steady acting; and is it to be supposed that ministers are to free themselves from sedate thinking, and
consistent

consistent acting? Are they not to embrace every opportunity of acting rationally and agreeably to their station? And if they fail of this, do not they commit a crime against the dignity of their profession? which, in its consequences, is injurious to the spread and influence of virtue and religion.—If ministers take no thought, or but little care, to adorn their profession, by a suitable and becoming moral conduct—if they do not live and act agreeable to the doctrine they *preach* and dictate to others—do they not give too *just* occasion for them to suspect the truth of what they say. And if they appear to be lukewarm and unconcerned about the work and business they have to do—if they neglect “to feed the flock of God, to give “to every one his portion in due season”—is it any wonder, that christians in general are so barren, and so destitute of the graces of the gospel?—Permit me then, in the first place, to point out the duty and business of ministers; and secondly, their qualifications.

First, as to the duty of ministers, it is but natural to observe, that it is great and important.—Their work and business are

great, important, and of an interesting nature.—They should consider themselves as under perpetual obligations to promote the honour of God, the good of men, and the general interest of christianity.—So great and valuable a cause as the cause of religion, virtue, and real goodness, ought to engage the serious attention of every christian, and more especially the ministers of the gospel, who are engaged as ambassadors for Christ, to recommend religion and the doctrines of the gospel to men—to instil into their minds, by persuasion, example, and doctrine, such virtues and duties, as will make them good christians, and happy for ever.—Dispensing of these truths and doctrines of religion, are the offices which belong to the ministers of Christ, and the servants of God; and they ought to be discharged with care and faithfulness.—Every servant of God in the gospel of his Son, takes upon himself an important trust; for it is the gospel, and the care of souls, that is committed to his charge: and he therefore ought to consider how he discharges his trust. The best endeavours should be used to reclaim christian sinners, as they profess a holy religion, and therefore

therefore are objects of compassion, whilst they continue in such a dangerous state, condemned by their own consciences, as well as the gospel of Christ—and who so fit for it as the ministers of Christ? Nay, it is their duty to endeavour, by sound reasoning, to convince them of their unhappy state—to reprove, instruct, exhort, and warn them, with plainness and earnestness, with firmness and honesty, with long-suffering, gentleness, and meekness; that they, by these ordinary means, may work a reformation in them, and bring them to a more happy and comfortable state.—The thoughtless and inconsiderate, the weak and the wavering, the moaning, and the humble christian, are all the objects of a minister's care and concern; and to each of these he is obliged, by his office, and the ties of humanity, to offer suitable relief—that in all his ministrations he may, in the most plain and awakening manner, represent to every christian, the peculiar danger and temptations naturally arising from the different conditions of human life.—And may it not be presumed that, from the ministers neglect, and their not attending to their duty, in giving such

suitable admonition to different christians,
 according as their different states require and
 call for—Is it not, I say, to be presumed,
 that it is from the ministers neglect of duty
 in this particular, that religion is decaying?
 Men are inclined and addicted to different
 evils, some to one thing, and others to ano-
 ther; and they have different tempers and
 dispositions; all which ought to be consi-
 dered, and different treatment used; for
 want of which they may grow obstinate and
 refractory in their ways, till at last they be-
 come quite confirmed in vicious habits:
 and if every minister of Christ would
 attend to this part of his duty, we might ar-
 rive to some cheering and animating hopes
 that religion and virtue would put up their
 face, and be revived again.—Ministers of
 religion are called “ the stewards of the my-
 “ steries of God—those whom our Lord
 “ has made rulers over his household, to give
 “ them meat in due season”—and as such, it
 is required of them, to labour in the Lord’s
 vineyard, to take pains and care to instruct
 the ignorant, to endeavour to confirm all in
 the faith of the gospel—to defend and vin-
 dicate the being and providence of God—to
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exert their talents and best endeavours to baffle and expose atheism and infidelity—to explain every doctrine and duty of the gospel, and to rescue them from all vain and trifling interpretations, and from perverse glosses.—This would be acting like men, “like good stewards of the manifold graces of God ;”—it would be acting up to the dignity of their office—and doing honour to the cause they have espoused.—But here it may be observed, (and I hope it may be observed without offence) that it is not the business and duty of ministers to recommend to men any particular article of faith, or point of doctrine, which is nowhere to be found in the word of God ; nor to be fond of promoting mysterious principles of religion.—For what advantage can it be, or what end does it answer, to wrap religion up in darkness and in mysterious subtilties ? —Or is it possible that religion should be revived, while the ministers thereof are more fond of, pay a greater deference to, and lay a greater stress upon, their own creeds, articles, and principles, than they do upon the principles and doctrines which christianity abounds with ? The doctrines of the
christian

christian religion are plain and easy truths ; and such should be the themes of every minister of Christ, to illustrate* and enlarge upon, and not to labour to carry their faith beyond their understanding and reason. No man is bound to believe without ideas ; nor indeed can he, any more than a blind man can discern colours—so no minister ought to believe, practise, or teach any thing that is mysterious and incomprehensible.—“ My-
 “ steries (says a very great writer) yield nei-
 “ ther pleasure nor profit—let him (let
 “ every minister of the gospel) ask himself,
 “ of what use are disputes about personali-
 “ ties, subsistencies, the hypostatical union,
 “ and other famous points, which distract
 “ the minds of the vulgar, and which the
 “ learned themselves cannot tell how to ex-
 “ plain. The Scripture has none of these
 “ dark phrases; but is a plain intelligible
 “ rule. Let us therefore study that more,
 “ and scholastic explications of it less—
 “ which have in many places darkened the
 “ text, and made difficulties where they
 “ found none.”——From hence we may ob-
 serve, that it would be much to the advantage
 of religion, tend greatly to the increase of
 truth

truth and virtue, and be conducive toward the removal of bigotry, superstition, and blind enthusiastic zeal, and for the establishing of a rational faith, and a reasonable system of religion; if the pastors and governors of the church of Christ would but attend to the peculiar province which belongs to them.—They should take particular care not to embarrass their own minds, nor puzzle others with difficulties and inexplicable mysteries; but to deal in the plain and evident truths of christianity, and in the necessary points of doctrine and practice, as they are laid down in Scripture—“to take
 “heed how or what they build upon the
 “foundation that is laid, which is Jesus
 “Christ: see *1 Cor.* iii. 10, 11.—to know in
 “whom they have believed; and to hold
 “fast the form of sound words in faith and
 “love, *2 Tim.* i. 12.—and not to be tossed
 “to and fro, and carried about with every
 “wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men,
 “and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie
 “in wait to deceive, *Eph.* iv. 14.—but to be
 “stedfast, immoveable, and always abound-
 “ing in the work of the Lord, *1 Cor.* xv.
 “58.”—As this is a duty incumbent on
 all

all christians, so more especially it concerns the ministers of Christ :—they should “ con-
 “ tend earnestly for the plain truths of the
 “ gospel, and that faith which was once de-
 “ livered to the saints.”——This, Reverend
 Sirs, you cannot but know, is but your rea-
 sonable duty—a duty, which if you have
 neglected, I hope you will now perform :
 and I would humbly beseech you to search
 the Scriptures, and speak as the oracles of
 God direct you ; “ that you yourselves, and
 “ those you have the care of, may be rooted
 “ and built up in Christ, and stablished in
 “ the faith, as you have been taught,
 “ abounding therein with thanksgiving,”
Col. ii. 7.—Take to yourselves the advice of
 St. Paul, to his son Timothy, “ Take heed,
 “ not only to yourselves, but also to your
 “ doctrine.” See *1 Tim. iv. 16.*—Take your
 principles, and doctrines, from the Scriptures
 themselves ; and those principles and doc-
 trines, which you conceive to be founded in
 christianity, and which you have adopted
 and made your own, you must take parti-
 cular care that they accord and harmonize
 together, and that they are agreeable to the
 tenor of Scripture, to the reason of things,
 and

and the perfections of God:—and then; whatever are the attempts against common christianity, you will be able to defend it with credit and applause.—For since your weapons, “ the weapons of your warfare, “ will not be carnal, but mighty through “ the assistance of God’s grace and provi- “ dence, to the pulling down of strong “ holds,” 2 *Cor.* x. 4. you will then be powerfully induced to “ renounce the hid- “ den things of dishonesty, not walking in “ craftiness, nor handling the word of God de- “ ceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth, “ commending yourselves to every man’s “ conscience in the sight of God; and ap- “ proving yourselves, and your doctrine, by “ pureness, by knowledge, by long-suffer- “ ing, by love unfeigned, by the word of “ truth, by the power of God, by the ar- “ mour of righteousness.” See 2 *Cor.* iv. 2. *ibid.* vi. 4, 6, 7. This was the rule laid down, and in this manner it was that the primitive founders and preachers of the gospel introduced the doctrines of religion among men; “ in doctrine, shewing un- “ corruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech “ that cannot be condemned,” *Titus* ii. 7, 8.

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And if now, all the ministers and teachers of christianity, all who have devoted themselves to the work of propagating and inculcating the doctrines of the gospel, and who in a peculiar manner are the servants of the Lord, would be persuaded to imitate the first founders and ambassadors of christianity, and lay down the same rules, and invariably observe them, they would then do great service to the cause of truth, and contribute much to the revival, growth, and advancement of pure religion.—But if, instead of this, they pay but little regard to the sacred writings, “ and if they have laid out their “ zeal, in inculcating mystical and allegorical “ divinity, or a few metaphysical, confused, “ and unintelligible notions, taken from the “ school-men, and have called that right orthodox divinity, tho’ it bears no resemblance to the pure simple doctrine of Christ “ and his apostles, no wonder the people “ der such pastors have not been able to judge “ of christianity.” (See Dr. Benson’s Reasonableness of Christianity.) But this must be a very great fault in the teachers of religion : and if such be their practice, they have reason to be ashamed ; because God is

not glorified on this behalf, nor are men instructed in the grounds of religion: And can it be expected they should, if the ministers of Christ have not their religion rooted in their understandings? If they know not what they pretend to believe, nor can give any reason why they should believe it, it is not likely that such christian divines as these, who have never taken the pains to examine into their religion, and understand but little or nothing of it, can do or suffer much for the sake of it.—And is there not a strong presumption to believe, that one reason why some ministers know so little of religion, and do so poorly illustrate the doctrines of christianity, is, because they so very slightly employ their minds in the study of the Scripture, or upon their business, nor attend to the functions of the pastoral office; but instead of that, have devoted themselves, their time, and their talents, to the common affairs of this life, to the almost total neglect of the one thing needful.—But permit me, upon this occasion, to recite the words of St. Paul, where he forbids christian ministers to “entangle themselves with “the affairs of this life,” *2 Tim. ii. 4.* The meaning

meaning of the apostle, I humbly conceive to be, That the ministers of Christ, who have enlisted themselves into his service, should not so involve their minds with confusion and perplexity about the unnecessary and transitory concerns of this life, as to prevent the exertion of their powers in the discharge of the duty and office which they are called to.—They should neglect no opportunity, for the sake of any temporal good, of setting forth the salvation of men, the honour of God, and the credit of religion.—This they should always have in view, and at heart, and nothing should divert them from this God-like pursuit. To be wholly devoted to the pleasures and employments of this life, at the expence of parting with the high and important services of religion, can never be justifiable in any of the professors of christianity, especially in the ministers thereof.—Not that they are called upon to free and divest themselves of a proper and prudent care and thought about the common and necessary supports of life:—those in particular, who have not a maintenance allowed them, are obliged and necessitated to it, to provide for themselves

and their families. This is the case of many very sensible and worthy protestant dissenting ministers, who cannot avoid intermeddling with the affairs of this life for a competent subsistence : and this may be done honourably, and consistently with the integrity of a good christian, and the character of a minister ; for the apostle to the Thessalonians declares, that he himself, and his companions Silvanus and Timotheus, *laboured* night and day (or worked at their trades early and late) to maintain themselves ; “ because,” says the apostle, “ we “ would not be *chargeable* to any of you.” But yet, notwithstanding this, the apostle’s main aim and grand view and scope was, the introducing the religion of Jesus.—He was careful and constant in his duty as a minister—and nothing had he more at heart than serving Christ Jesus his Lord, and honouring him among men :—“ to preach the “ gospel to every creature,” was his great concern ; nor was he ashamed to appear a faithful and zealous advocate for it, as knowing, wherever it was believed and embraced, it would be found *the power of God unto salvation*. And that he might contribute as

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much as possible to so happy an end, he spared no labour or pains, but wherever he came, he used his utmost endeavours in all things to approve himself a minister of God, “in much patience—in afflictions—in necessities—in distresses—in stripes—in imprisonments—in tumults—in labours—in watchings—in fastings*.” Amidst all these difficulties, the apostle could appeal to them (among whom he had laboured) that he had kept back nothing that was profitable for them, nor had he shunned “to declare unto them the whole council of God†.” But how few of the ministers of Christ are there now, that have fully discharged their duty, or have in any degree imitated the apostle’s zeal and concern for the blessed cause of religion, and the salvation of men?—Religion is still important—men’s souls are as precious now as they were at the commencement of christianity—heaven and happiness are still the same—men’s difficulties are less now (God be praised) than they were in the apostles days.—But perhaps it will be said, that the ministers of the gospel have not the same

* 2 Cor. vi. 4, 5.

† Acts xx. 26, 27.
power,

power, that their abilities are much less than the apostles were ; be it so : But is not their zeal much more abated and diminished ? Is there not too much room for the complaint of the prophet Isaiah, chap. lvi. ver. 10. “ that the Lord’s watchmen are *blind* and “ *ignorant, sleeping*, lying down, and given “ to slumber.” Do they not appear to be unconcerned (at least too much so) about their principal business, namely, a supreme regard to the honour and will of God, and to the Redeemer, and the making known his religion among men, on which their best happiness depends ? And is it not too apparently true, that the guides and leaders of the flock of God forsake their trust, desert those that are committed to their care, and neglect their duty, when there is no worldly advantage to be made by it ?—But is this *honourable* and *consistent* ? Judge ye. What, must the little concerns of this perishing world take all your care and attention, while the important things of religion, and the momentous concerns of eternity, are left unregarded, and shifted at pleasure ! Surely a future state of recompence, the great and glorious things which christianity promises to

good men, is worth the enquiry, and demands the attention of all christians: and should not the ministers of Christ take care and pains to remind, or revive the memory of common christians with these things, and the conditions and qualifications on which future blessedness is promised to them?—Men of leisure should study to prepare instructions for them, and read the Scriptures every Lord's-day in public, *explaining* those sacred writings, and applying them to the various cases of mankind. This would be doing great service to christianity, and the knowledge of it would be more extensive, and religion revived; at least, men would not treat it with scorn and acrimony; but would soon be prejudiced in favour of a religion which abounds with such excellent moral instructions and duties, “which, without doubt, are the weightier matters of the law.”—But at the same time it is to be remembered, that the ministers of Christ should pay a regard to the positive institutions of the gospel, and earnestly recommend them to the attention and observation of men; and I am persuaded, that no serious, considerate, thinking man will pretend to
 say,

say, that the christian sacraments are unreasonable or superstitious, but on the contrary, will admit that they were instituted as means and assistances to preserve men stedfast in religion.—And as every minister of Christ ought diligently and impartially to examine and inquire into the religion which he is employed to preach, he ought also fairly and honestly to represent it as he finds it in the inspired records; he should faithfully set forth the religion of Christ, his only Lord and master in spiritual affairs, without any regard to the authority of man: and when he clearly and unreservedly recommends the religion of Christ, the plain and evident truths of the gospel, to the attention of men, the common people will exercise their own private judgment to better advantage, and will be better furnished “to give a reason of the hope that is in them.” And the more strictly christianity is examined, and the more narrowly it is looked into, the better it will be understood; more beauty and goodness discovered, and consequently will be more generally approved; and christians will be more strongly confirmed in their belief of it: and the better it is understood, and the stronger men are confirmed and

established in the belief of it; the nearer will they conform to its holy precepts, and be possessed with the spirit of religion; and their whole life, actions, conversation, and temper, will accord more with it. And every minister ought to have this in view; and all his public ministrations and instructions should be directly subservient to this end.—

And besides these his public instructions, one thing more seems to be necessary, and a very incumbent duty, in order still farther, if possible, to contribute to the revival and advancement of religion, and that is, to take care to improve every opportunity and interval of time that can be spared from study and public labour, in a private religious conversation: and there is a great necessity for ministers often and frequently to encourage a religious conversation; for “when iniquity abounds, and the love of many waxeth cold,” it may be, that spiritual counsel, and religious conversation, will silence, or at least check, a frothy, lewd, and profane conversation, and be a means of strengthening the good dispositions of others; and as we know that “evil communications greatly tend to corrupt good manners,” so good communications as much, or more, tend

tend to purify the mind, and strengthen the moral powers : and surely nothing can be of greater importance to be preserved ; nothing which requires greater attention and more constant care, that they may be improved : and I know of no better or more effectual means for that purpose, than “ a conversation becoming the gospel.” To be “ sober and holy in all manner of conversation,” is what christians are exhorted to ; and the teachers of religion cannot better bestow their pains and labour, with a view of a more extensive good, than in their common conversation to recommend it. We are informed by the prophet Malachi, that at a time when impiety and irreligion were very prevalent, and almost universal, there were some few that “ feared the Lord, and often spake one to another.” There were some few righteous, pious persons, who had separated themselves from the profane and irreligious ; and these few thought upon the name of the Lord, and often had religious conferences with one another. They distinguished themselves from the workers of wickedness, by their affection and zeal to the name and worship

of the true God, “ and a book of remembrance was written for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name, “ And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels, and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.”

What can be conceived to be a more powerful motive and excitement to a religious conversation, than a firm belief of the notice, acceptance, and approbation of heaven? of God’s hearkening, hearing, observing, and keeping an exact record of the pious thoughts, words, and good works of them that fear him. And should not every minister of a holy religion earnestly recommend and encourage such a conversation, as will meet with the divine acceptance, and tends to revive a decaying religion?—Should they not imitate the apostles zeal and example, as we have it recorded in *Acts*, ch. xv. ver. 36. “ Let us go again, and visit our brethren, “ in every city where we have preached the “ word of the Lord.” Would not such a conduct be much to the advantage of religion, and tend to the suppression of vice? Could we but persuade the ministers of every

every denomination to go and visit their brethren ; to go and visit every christian family which they have the care of, and examine into their moral conduct and conversation—to see whether they keep up a spirit of religion at home ; and if they would but converse with them on religious subjects freely, unreservedly, and friendly, exhort them daily, and admonish them as brethren, reprove those that had been remiss and wanting in their duty, in a kind, affectionate, and benevolent manner, and comfort, encourage, and strengthen those who abound in the graces of the gospel ; such an exemplary conduct in the ministers of Christ would directly tend to inspire the people's minds with a higher veneration of the laws and doctrines of christianity, and thereby contribute to their improvement in moral and religious perfection. Add to this, that religious conversation, constantly kept up in private families, must be of infinite service to young persons, to induce them to the amiable practice of early piety, and the “ remembrance of their Creator in the days “ of their youth ;” so that they will readily “ turn their feet to his testimonies, and will “ make

“ make haste and delay not to keep all his
 “ commandments.” Thus an early turn
 being given to piety and virtue, will prevent
 the ill effects arising from the follies and
 vices of youth, and naturally pave the way
 to a steady course of universal righteousness.
 Another rule to be observed, and a duty
 which belongs to those that have the over-
 sight of the flock of God, is, to visit, and
 comfort, and pray for, those (in an especial
 manner) that are afflicted : *Is any sick* (saith
 the apostle) *among you ? Let him call for*
the elders of the church, and let them pray over
him, anointing him with oil, in the name of the
Lord.—These words (I think) are to be
 understood in the most general and universal
 sense: the rule the apostle has laid down
 cannot well be evaded, or applied to parti-
 cular persons, guilty of notorious and hei-
 nous enormities, but naturally refers to any
 member of the church of Christ, under any
 kind or sort of afflictions or sickness.—*Is any*
sick among you, (are the express words of the
 apostle) *let him call for the elders* (or pastors)
of the church. It must be the sincere and de-
 vout desire of the person afflicted to call or
 send for the elders, to pray over him, and
 anoint

anoint him with oil, (or perform the holy and sacred unction) in the name of the Lord. And for their great encouragement to the observance of this ordinance of christianity, the sick person has the assurance of obtaining pardon of his sins. *If he has committed sins* (saith the apostle) *they shall be forgiven him.* As much as if the apostle had said, If it should be so, or supposing it should sometimes be the case, that he hath committed sins, they shall, on the solemn performance of this duty, be forgiven him. Not that the apostle intended to set forth a wilful habitual sinner as the only fit object of the holy unction : no ; for if he be sick, or is afflicted by the hand of providence, that is a sufficient cause, separate from any supposition of his being a great enormous sinner, to desire the performance of this sacred ordinance : “ Which (says a very judicious author) through divine grace, and “ God’s unbounded love to his people, is “ appointed and designed for the relief of “ our bodies—the comfort of our souls— “ the strengthening of our faith and hope “ in all the gracious promises of his holy “ word, and stedfast walking in all the sa-
“ cred

“ cred ordinances of his house and worship;
 “ and also for the advancement of his own
 “ glory—the discovery of his love and faith-
 “ fulness, and the manifestation of the truth
 “ of the christian religion, throughout all
 “ the ages of it, till Christ shall return again
 “ to his church and people.”——Thus have
 I given, as I humbly conceive, the true
 sense of this passage under consideration;
 and I cannot but think it the duty of all
 pastors, when they are called to it, readily
 to comply with, and solemnly perform this
 ordinance of the gospel. And indeed, if
 they would pay a conscientious regard to
 this and all other duties, whether public or
 private, constantly endeavouring to promote
 the grand end of all, viz. holiness of life;
 this would prove an excellent means to re-
 vive a spirit of religion, and derive a blessing
 from God upon their ministerial labours.
 But let it be always remembered, and deeply
 fixed in the hearts of the ministers of Christ,
 that they are particularly obliged not only to
 visit the fatherless and widows in their afflic-
 tion, but also to “ keep themselves unspotted
 “ from the world.”——Which leads me, se-
 condly,

condly, to observe and lay before you your qualifications.

The qualifications of christian ministers are by the apostle * laid down in a plain manner—clear and expressive; and these qualifications every minister must endeavour to attain to: for the rules the apostle has laid down, for the government of their lives and actions, are standing rules, and will remain in force, and have a powerful persuasive tendency, if they are strictly observed, to work upon the minds, and to reclaim the manners of the wicked. Having taken a view of the minister's office, and the duties resulting from it, and having plainly shewn that one great

* 1 Tim. chap. iii. verses 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, & 6. Compare with Titus, chap. i. verses 7 & 8.

1st, "A bishop must be blameless"—of unblemished life.

2dly, "The husband of one wife"—not having more than one at a time.

3dly, "Vigilant"—attentive and active, "fervent in spirit, serving the Lord."

4thly, "Sober"—temperate and prudent.

5thly, "Of good behaviour"—chaste, decent, and becoming behaviour.

6thly, "Given to hospitality"—generous, benevolent, and kind to all.

7thly, "Apt to teach"—ready, willing, and qualified to teach, or instruct others.

branch

branch of his duty is to enforce and recommend practical religion, to imprint upon the minds of the people a deep sense of the importance of virtue, and their strict obligations to the practice of it; it remains, that I point out the absolute necessity of a minister's being endued with those virtues he recommends to others, this being essentially requisite to render his ministerial labours successful, and give weight and authority to the instructions he delivers. He therefore must shine in good morals, and be a pattern and example of good works. Inwardly, from the heart, he should love and venerate virtue and real goodness; and his life (his whole life and conversation) must bear testimony and indignation against those vices he openly condemns: for if he be not thus qualified, but loose in his own moral principles—his mind immersed in sensuality—darkened and cramped by vicious habits—the cogency and strength of his persuasions will have none or but little effect, weight, or influence. Besides, at this rate of acting, instead of being serviceable to the cause of God and religion, he undermines and breaks afunder all those moral and religious obligations

tions which every christian minister is bound, by the ties of his profession, to do all he can to establish, to cement, and fasten together ; and no man can, with any justness, be called a friend to religion, or a defender of it, who disgraces it by a loose and licentious practice ; and the impure and immoral lives of christian divines must dissolve all that trust and confidence which good men, men of strict virtue and integrity, can and do repose in one another. Nothing can prejudice the minds of the ignorant and vulgar more against the truths of religion, than the bad lives of the professors and teachers of it ; nor can any create a stronger disgust and aversion to the sober thought, than to see them gay and voluptuous.—Does it not then concern those who are gifted, and have abilities for, and are called to the work of the ministry, to endeavour to attain those virtues, habits, and moral qualifications, which the gospel of Christ has enjoined, and which he himself and his apostles has given them an example of, and commanded them to imitate that true piety and holiness, that goodness, meekness, and humanity, patience, peaceableness, and self-denial, which the

first and primitive christians abounded in.—Suffer me, therefore, to exhort you, in the spirit of meekness, to “take heed” (as the apostle directs) “to yourselves,” to your own conduct; and see that you behave in such a manner, as none may have any reason to despise you; or, as the apostle exhorts, upon another occasion, “let not your good be evil spoken of;”—but be a pattern of faith, holiness, purity, benevolence, and all kind of virtues.—Holding “faith, and especially a good conscience, both towards God and man—walk worthy of your vocation, and adorn it, by giving all diligence to make your calling and election sure.—“Watch and pray, that ye enter not” (nor lead others) “into temptation.”—These instructions demand the most serious attention of every christian; but more especially the ministers of religion: for they have the same, or similar passions, affections, and temptations with other men; which daily experience witnesseth: and this is a sufficient reason for them to watch and pray; to be vigilant and circumspect: *For we* (saith the apostle) *wrestle not against flesh and blood,* (not only against our own and other mens passions)

passions) but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore, take unto you the whole armour of God; that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breast-plate of righteousness. In a word, it is absolutely necessary that ministers of Christ should be lively patterns of all christian virtues. With respect to their own personal conduct, they should shew forth sobriety, temperance, and self-government; they should be moderate in the use of lawful, and totally abstain from unlawful gratifications; for immoderate desires, and intemperance, destroy the superiority and freedom of the mind, clog and fetter the thinking powers, and render them useless, or at least tend to enervate them, impair their liberty, and bring them into slavery. But how monstrous an appearance is this for men who are distinguished and set apart for the service of religion, to have the affections, and sensual desires and objects, uppermost in the heart, and superlatively adored,

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and

and all things, even conscience itself, sacrificed to their service; “ whose God is their
 “ belly, and who serve not our Lord Jesus
 “ Christ.” But “ * since the end of all
 “ things is at hand, we ought to be sober
 “ and temperate, and † to take heed, lest
 “ at any time our hearts be overcharged
 “ with surfeiting and drunkenness, and the
 “ cares of this life, and so that day come
 “ upon us unawares. ‡ Wherefore gird
 “ up the loins of your minds, be sober,
 “ and hope unto the end, for the grace
 “ that shall be brought unto you at the
 “ revelation of Jesus Christ.” And not
 only sobriety and temperance should every
 minister exercise, but also to this he must
 add, as necessary qualifications, patience,
 godliness, brotherly kindness, candor, and
 assiduity : “ These things must be in you,
 “ and abound ;” for you are obliged to
 recommend these virtues to others, and of
 consequence are bound to practise them
 yourselves: or if not, you will be unquali-
 fied for the work of the ministry, “ barren
 “ and unfruitful in the knowledge of our

* 1 Pet. iv. 7. † Luke xxi. 34. ‡ 1 Pet. i. 13.

“ Lord Jesus Christ : but if you do these
“ things,” (saith the apostle, 2 *Peter* i. 10,
11.) “ ye shall never fall ; for so an en-
“ trance shall be ministered unto you abun-
“ dantly into the everlasting kingdom.”—
Consider what has been said ; and may the
Lord give you understanding in all things,
Amen.

PART THE THIRD.

Shewing the duty of christian people towards their ministers.

IT may be observed, consistently with truth, that the generality of christians are too apt to pay a partial obedience to the strict rules of the holy gospel ; and though they may profess a very high esteem for the heavenly precepts it contains, and more especially when others are called upon to practise them, yet they are frequently very backward in acquiring good dispositions, and in regulating their own lives and actions, by a proper regard to their holy religion. It is a dangerous mistake in many christians, to imagine that they come up to the character of true and worthy christians, merely upon account of the soundness of their belief, or because they cannot accuse themselves of gross and scandalous vices, tho' at the same time they are very deficient in the amiable practice of doing good to men, according to their several abilities ; and we labour under

der so many prejudices, unless particular care be taken to divest our minds of them, that we too readily embrace many things as true, and think our method of acting right, without sufficient examination, and we dare not make a strict enquiry, lest we should find ourselves mistaken :—the consequence of which is, a superficial scheme of religion only seated in the head, without sinking into the heart ; which serves to amuse the mind in the softer seasons of human life, but has not proper weight to influence and direct the tenor of our practice. But if we would make the Scriptures the rule of our life, we must resolve, with full purpose, to hearken to, and do all that the Lord our God shall there require of us, and not suffer any wrong bias, corrupt passion, or vicious inclination, to cast a cloud before our eyes, or prevent our seeing or receiving the truth : for while we have any worldly or some other interest on foot, different from the truth, we shall not be very attentive to find out the truth, nor yet follow its direction when found out ; and if we prove careless in our main and final interest, we shall be induced to make religious concerns subservient to our selfish

purposes, instead of employing our best endeavours to render all our designs and proceedings subservient to religion, which is certainly our express and indispensable duty. If indeed religion entirely depended upon our own opinions or imaginations, we might then bend or alter it into whatever shape we thought most agreeable to our inclinations or interest : but the case is far otherwise ; true religion is of an inflexible nature, and has its foundation in the will of Almighty God, *with whom is no variableness, or shadow of turning* : and this will is plainly and distinctly set forth in the New Testament ; where, if we have sincere and honest hearts, we may find every branch of our christian duty delivered in the clearest and strongest light, and inculcated with the greatest weight, by Christ and his apostles, who alone had a commission from God to settle this grand affair ; and it is a vain and arrogant imagination to think of accommodating the terms of salvation, fixed by God himself, to our schemes, or our inclinations. Our business is to examine, with sincere and upright intentions, what is laid down in the word of God, and to form the most hearty
 resolu-

resolutions of reducing to practice, what we are once convinced the Lord our God requires of us ; and more particularly, let us attend at this time, “ with a pure heart, “ and a good conscience, and faith un- “ feigned,” to the duties we owe to the ministers of Christ.

And first, the ministers to whom duty is owing from the people, are such, whose character, qualifications, and duty, have been already considered—men of real worth and merit—such who are the Lord’s faithful servants—and who direct their studies and time with a view to promote the knowledge and practice of christianity : and those who, instead of being “ lords over God’s “ heritage,” are “ ensamples to the flock ;” these ministers it is the people’s duty to respect, value, regard, esteem, and honour ; not for their bare name, or title, but for their work’s sake, for their usefulness and service in the church of Christ : and this is what St. Paul exhorteth the Thessalonians to,

1 *Thess.* v. 12, 13. “ to know them who “ laboured among them, and were over “ them in the Lord, and admonished them, “ and to esteem them very highly in love

“ for their work sake.” But how reverse and directly contrary to the apostle’s advice, is the behaviour of many people to their ministers now? Instead of “ esteeming them “ very highly,” is it not a question whether they esteem them at all? Or, if they do, what testimony do they give of their respects and esteem to them? Is it by their love to them? Or is it not rather by a slight and indifferent carriage towards them? Or do they love the cause, and have a regard to the interest of religion, and so upon this account do they esteem their ministers?——But I am afraid that the generality of people fall very short of “ esteeming their ministers “ highly for their work sake,” as having no real love for the cause of religion, or the ministers of it.——God forbid that this should be always the unhappy case: but surely there are too just grounds for supposing that serious piety, and the practice of christian morals, have woefully declined, through the careless behaviour and indifference of the people. “ Besides, (says an “ excellent writer) as it is impossible that “ the weight and credit of any considerable “ character should be maintained, if they
“ who

“ who are invested with it are slighted and
 “ vilified ; it from hence necessarily fol-
 “ lows, that the disrespect shewn to the
 “ faithful ministers of Christ is not likely to
 “ terminate in their persons, but tends to
 “ bring the office itself into contempt : —
 “ and a despised ministry has always been,
 “ and ever will be, in proportion, an un-
 “ successful one. Let the people therefore
 “ take heed, that neither a blind zeal, nor
 “ haughtiness, nor passion, nor a petulant
 “ captious temper, be ever suffered to hurry
 “ matters on to this extreme, to the dis-
 “ credit of christianity, and the obstructing
 “ its progress.” But on the contrary, “ let
 “ us put on humbleness of mind,” let us be
 kind, courteous, affable, and condescend-
 ing, and behave respectfully towards our mi-
 nisters, by shewing love and esteem for
 them. As doubtless we are expressly re-
 quired to exercise the amiable virtue of mu-
 tual love ; so, more especially the faithful
 ministers of Christ, should be the objects of
 our love and peculiar kindness ; and this
 will lead us to another duty which we owe
 to them, and that is, to pray for them :
 for when we sincerely love, esteem, and
 honour

honour them, we cannot but wish well to them, and to the cause they are employed to vindicate, and we cannot then but pray for them, for their success in the ministration of the word, for the growth and revival of true religion, and that we thereby “ may be strengthened, comforted, and “ built up in our most holy faith.” We therefore should pray to the supreme Father and dispenser of all grace, that they may enjoy such portions of his holy spirit as may render them able ministers of the New Testament; *praying for us*, (saith the apostle, Col. iv. 3, 4.) *that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, that I may make it manifest as I ought to speak.* Again, to the same purpose, (Eph. vi. 18, 19.) *Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance, and supplication for all saints; and for me, that utterance may be given unto me.* The apostle here enjoins the common people to be constant in a course of prayer to God for themselves and others; and particularly calls upon them to recommend the success of their ministers to Almighty God in their solemn

lemn devotions. But how seldom is this duty performed? Men seem to be unconcerned, and act as if they were independant, and could live for ever, and do as they please without the help of their fellow creatures, and independant of the providence and direction of heaven; for how shamefully do they neglect a duty, which nature itself dictates, and is of itself both reasonable and interesting? What can be conceived to be more proper, or more suitably adapted to keep up a spirit of piety and devotion towards God, and benevolence towards our fellow creatures, than prayer? What more becoming creatures naturally weak and indigent, who are not sufficient for their own happiness? And what a mighty unspeakable privilege and comfort is it, that we are permitted to have recourse to God by prayer, and to hold communion with the supreme disposer of all things, and sovereign governor of the world, to pour out our souls before him, and represent our wants, and make our complaints unto him, and humbly implore his gracious help and assistance for ourselves, and for others, who are partakers with us of the same griefs, sorrow, and

wants?

wants? The light wits of the present age, it is to be feared, will make a scoff at and ridicule this duty of prayer; they will be ready to say, *What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?*—But the time is hastening, when all such despisers of all religion shall be amazed at the salvation of the righteous; and they will be greatly alarmed and troubled for their own folly; for anguish of spirit, shall say within themselves, (as we have it in the Book of Wisdom) “this was he (meaning the righteous) “whom we had some time in derision, and “a proverb of reproach.—We fools “counted his life madness, and his end “without honour; therefore have we erred “from the way of truth—we wearied “ourselves in the way of wickedness and “destruction—yea, what hath pride profited us? or what good hath riches, with “our vaunting, brought us?”—But are these sort of men the only persons who make light of religious duties, and especially prayer? Do not christians themselves neglect it, slight, and undervalue it; at least are soon weary of it? which must tend to the decay
of

of all religion. Christian people, therefore, should consider themselves as deeply concerned in the religious duty of prayer, as it is an excellent means to keep up a spirit of religion, and is naturally qualified to prepare the mind for the happiness of heaven. They should be frequently addressing themselves to Almighty God, in the name of Christ—they should be zealous in private piety and family prayer—and likewise exemplary in a constant attendance upon public worship every Lord's-day; this being of great use to support a general sense of God, a providence, and of the great indispensable obligations of religion, in all its branches. A total neglect of public worship is not only shewing great disrespect to the ministers of Christ, but likewise has a natural tendency to produce an ignorant and barbarous state, and an universal corruption of the morals of men. But what little trifling things keep or hinder persons from attending the public worship of God? What trifling and mean objections do they often make? The poorer sort often absent themselves, because they are poor and mean in apparel, or because domestic cares and troubles overload

load and press down their minds, so that they have no life nor spirit to make their appearance in a public religious assembly: but can it be reasonably thought that is the way to have their cares and troubles lessened, or to have a divine blessing upon their labours, while they refuse to assemble themselves with their christian brethren, for the purposes of public religious worship? On the contrary, it seems to be the way to be poorer and poorer, both in temporals and spirituals.—Those in affluent circumstances, and in a high rank, either contemptuously or carelessly absent themselves from public worship, and various pretences they make for not attending; but all their excuses have been proved to have no foundation or weight. —Whatever rank or station men are in, if they habitually absent or withdraw themselves from public worship, they take an effectual method to cast off all regard to God, and of extinguishing in their own minds all sense of religious obligations; and their bad, criminal example directly tends to efface it out of others, and as directly tends to the spread of levity and wickedness; which must be of so ill a consequence to the cause
of

of christianity, that there is too just cause to fear, that in the end it will beget an indifference about all religion. The apostle, therefore, to the Hebrews (from a deep sense of the dangerous effects and consequences that would follow from the neglect and non-attendance of public worship) gives this particular caution, of “ not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is.” And our ever blessed Redeemer himself has given us great encouragement to assemble ourselves together in his name, to worship the Father in spirit and in truth; having assured us, that “ where two or three are gathered together in his name, that there he would be in the midst of them ;” that is, they might depend upon it, if they did assemble together in his name, and in the true fear of God, with good dispositions of mind, with sincere and honest intentions, that he would favour them with his special presence and blessing : and he has also declared, that “ the sabbath was made for man ;” (that is, as a late sensible author words it) “ had its appointment, from a regard to the welfare of our bodies and our souls : but man
8 “ being

“ being a composition of both soul and
 “ body, the sabbath could not have been
 “ said to be made for man, if any thing
 “ necessary to the welfare either of our
 “ soul or body might be wilfully neglected
 “ by us thereon.”—Again, the same author
 says, “ Certain it is, that those who in the
 “ primitive times became members of the
 “ church of Christ, assembled on the Lord’s-
 “ day, not only for the more especial com-
 “ memoration of the great work of crea-
 “ tion, but of our redemption also by Jesus
 “ Christ : a redemption manifestly com-
 “ pleted, by his resurrection from the dead
 “ on our christian sabbath ; so that, as the
 “ deliverance of the Israelites from their
 “ Egyptian bondage, was commanded to be
 “ commemorated on the Jewish sabbath,
 “ christians have, from the time of our
 “ Lord’s resurrection, held themselves ob-
 “ liged to celebrate the like thankful re-
 “ membrance of our redemption, on the
 “ first day of the week, which has ever
 “ since been called the Lord’s-day, and
 “ Sunday.” In the apostolic times, we are
 expressly told, “ that they continued with
 “ one accord, in prayer and supplication ;
 “ that

“ that they were all with one accord in one
 “ place ; and that they continued stedfastly
 “ in the apostles doctrine and fellowship,
 “ and in breaking of bread, and in prayer.”

This primitive practice, and apostolic example, are sufficient to claim our regard and imitation ; and therefore, for any one of us now, on any pretence whatever, to refuse to assemble together, to perform public worship, must be affronting to Almighty God, destructive of our own peace, and the welfare of society ; it is infamous in itself, and disclaiming all due honour and respect to the ministers of Christ.

Another part of the duty of christian people towards their ministers, is to allow them a proper support. This would want but little proving, if men would but attend to reason or Scripture : but the misfortune is, that they cannot bear to hear their duties urged home : the clearest arguments, the weightiest reasons, and the strongest motives, are not sufficient to convince them, when their selfish and worldly views are set in direct opposition to the love of religion, and to the will and command of God. Prejudice, conceit, and mere imagination, often
 G prevail

prevail over, take place, and rule, instead of reason, truth, and religion. The love of the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, are such mighty things, which men are so much enslaved to, and enamoured with, that they have but little relish to any thing strictly moral or religious.—Sensual and carnal affections, instinct, appetite, and custom, are often the primary and commanding principles, while the principles of reason and religion are violated, disregarded, and despised ; the gospel and its ministers are neglected, while a spirit of selfishness prevails, and destroys that which reason and natural equity and justice have established ; ministers are left destitute of common necessities, while the people are loading themselves with superfluities. Reason itself must convince every man, (if he would but exercise his Reason, and think at all about it) that ministers ought to be allowed a proper support ; and the gospel has confirmed it in such plain and strong terms, as will admit of no *may be*, or *may not be* ; and yet men act as if both reason and revelation were silent about it. *Do ye not know* (saith the apostle,

I Cor.

1 Cor. ix. 4—14.) *that they who minister about holy things, live of the things of the temple? and they who wait at the altar, are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained, that they who preach the gospel, should live of the gospel.* Can words be more expressive, plainer, or more forcible? The apostle appeals to their understanding: “Do ye not know?” Are you not acquainted, that the ministers under the Mosaic dispensation did live of the things of the temple?—those who were faithful and constant in dispensing to the people holy or religious things, and did wait upon them, were partakers with the altar. — “Even so hath the Lord ordained, that they who preach the gospel, should live of the gospel.”—Observe, it is what the Lord, not what men have ordained—it is the command and appointment of heaven; the Lord has ordained it, “that they who preach the gospel, should live of the gospel.” Let us now look into, and compare the conduct of christian people with this rule; and will it not appear quite monstrous? Do they allow their ministers a * maintenance? Can

* I mean dissenting ministers; for the established clergy have a maintenance by law.

gospel ministers say they live of the gospel? On the contrary, doth not experience oblige them to say, they suffer and are losers by it? No, saith the objector, they work for a good master; they are engaged in the cause of religion, and are the Lord's servants, and he will abundantly recompense them hereafter; and that the greater their difficulties are in this life, the greater their reward will be at the great day of retribution.—I make no doubt but that it will be so: but then how is the people's duty towards their ministers discharged? What account will they be able to give? What, must gospel ministers preach the gospel, and not live of the gospel? What, are they obliged to do their duty faithfully and constantly, and are the people exempted from all concern of duty? Do ministers, by fulfilling their own trust and duty, discharge the people's too? This rule may hold with those that maintain that Christ has done all, and left nothing for us to do: but then I should think, if Christ has done the people's duty, that he must also have done the ministers duty too; and so, according to this rule, ministers need not concern themselves with preaching the gospel, nor yet the people

people with what relates to their duty.—
 But since the Lord has appointed ministers in his church, and has commanded them to preach the gospel, they are obliged to concern and employ themselves about the Lord's work, and that business allotted to them—and the people are equally obliged to perform what relates to them, and to do that which the gospel has enjoined them ; and as the Lord has ordained, that “ they “ which preach the gospel, should live of “ the gospel,” it is the people's duty to look to it, and see that their ministers do live of the gospel. They are to have such a maintenance allowed them at least, as exempts them from want—for the Lord has ordained it ; and who dares to make void the command of God ?—Can they who deny or refuse to do what the Lord has commanded, expect a blessing upon their labours, either spiritual or temporal ? On the contrary, do they not go the direct way to incur the divine displeasure ? And those who do withhold a maintenance from their ministers, do refuse, in one point, yielding obedience to the command and appointment of heaven. To neglect, therefore, this

gospel ordinance, and wilfully to offend in this one instance, cannot be a small offence in the sight of that Being who has appointed it; and consequently, those who do refuse a compliance with it, must expect a great punishment; or if they do not expect it, they have no room to think they shall escape it: for do but consider in what manner the Lord has dealt with those in ages past, who did not keep his ordinances; the inhabitants of Meroz (*Judges* v. 23.) were under the curse or displeasure of God, because they denied to lend their assistance in God's cause—and the Ammonites and Moabites (*Deut.* xxiii. 3, 4.) were excluded from the congregation of the Lord to the tenth generation, because they did not meet God's peculiar people Israel, with bread and water. Consider this, O ye, who have refused to offer assistance to your ministers, according to your abilities.—You complain, and say, that your ministers are few and weak: and how should it be otherwise, while you withhold from them their just dues?—We must therefore consider what must be done on our parts; what duty we owe towards our ministers; and do the utmost we can to increase

crease their number and qualifications. To answer which end, the least we can in reason do, is freely to communicate of our temporal things to them. *Let him (saith the apostle) that is taught in the word, communicate unto him that teacheth, in all good things.* The great apostle here (in concurrence with what the Lord has ordained) strictly enjoins every one of us the duty of being liberal and free in our collections for the ministers support and maintenance.—Whilst we live in the constant and habitual neglect of this plain christian duty, we cannot have sufficient evidence of the sincerity of our faith in the gospel of Christ, neither do we shew any real respects to his Ministers.—Besides, is it not acting quite out of character? For what is more unreasonable, unnatural, and inhuman, than to deny the ministers of the gospel our temporal things, for sowing to us spiritual things?—*If we (saith the apostle) have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things? Gal. vi. 6.*—What, can any man who professes the christian name, think much to part with a small portion of the common things of this life, in order to pro-

cure so great a good as spiritual and eternal blessings? If then your ministers do give you the best instruction, comfort, and advice; if they spend and are spent for you; if their time, strength, and labour, are devoted to your service; can you detain or withhold from them your common temporal blessings? Is it reasonable, or consistent with the name and character of a man, and of a christian? judge ye. What, must they (as the apostle argues) go a warfare at their own charges? plant a vineyard, and not eat of the fruit thereof? or feed a flock, and not eat of the milk of the flock? What, has the Lord appointed labourers in his vineyard, and is there none found worthy of a reward? or if there be some few thought worthy, must all the rest be shut out, and excluded from all benevolence? If such have been the dealings of christian people towards their ministers, they are now called upon, and it is hoped that they for the future will for ever banish and bury in oblivion all such unequal, hard, and partial dealings; by which, if continued in, all the maxims of justice, equity, reason, and religion, must be greatly injured, if not totally destroyed.—God has taken

taken care and provided for the ox, that he should not be muzzled when he is labouring for the service of man: and shall God and man regard the life of a beast that must perish, and shall there be none found to regard the life of God's faithful ministers? Must none regard whether they sink or swim, live or die? this would be wonderful, and very irrational.—Pardon, great sirs, my plainness of speech, and suffer me to exhort you to perfect that which is wanting. Does it not very much concern you, to consider how much your present interest, and future good, honour, and happiness depend, upon your faithful discharge of duty towards your ministers. You cannot but know, that the less your ministers are entangled with the affairs of this life, the more at liberty they will be to display the riches of divine grace—and you must also know, that the cares and troubles of human life must cramp, fetter, and embarrass the mind, and tend to unfit it to be exerted in its full vigour in the things of God and religion:—Suffer me again, then, to exhort, advise, and request you, to communicate freely to the faithful ministers of the
gospel,

gospel, that they may be eased and freed from the cares (as much as may be) of this life; and I beg of you seriously to consider, whether what I have said (though in my own plain rustic way) does not entirely accord with reason and revelation. It is God's own ordinance, that his ministers should have a maintenance; and how then can you withhold it from them? It is not said, that you must allow them a maintenance at no other time but when they are decrepit, and have spent their strength in your behalf, and for your good; God has ordained it should be given them, when they are in a capacity to labour, and while they can be most useful to you. "But" (says an ancient writer) "whether they can do much or little, whether they can manage their work comfortably or not, or whether they be excellent or indifferent preachers, I suppose (says he) it is all one to some of you, so they can but have the gospel preached to them without any charge."— Or perhaps some do not care whether they have any minister at all; for the attention, or rather the desertion of some, doth sufficiently evince, that they have a greater love
for

for sensual enjoyments than for religion. Religion is the last, instead of the first thing that is thought of, and the least regarded; *and because iniquity doth abound, the love of many waxeth cold.*—Again, it is commonly objected, and said by the people, We are poor, and unable to allow our ministers a maintenance.—Answer: I looked (saith the above mentioned author) for this; I thought it would come at last. But are you poor indeed? Not all sure: if you be, this is the way to be poorer, to withhold from your ministers, to whom it is due, more than is meet. *Withhold not* (saith the wise man) *good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it. Say not unto thy neighbour, Go, and come again, and to-morrow I will give, when thou hast it by thee,* Prov. iii. 27, 28. Are you poorer than the primitive christians? They allowed their ministers a maintenance; and it is possible you might be richer in this world, if you were richer in good works. *The liberal soul* (saith the wise man, Prov. xi. 25.) *shall be made fat; but to withhold more than is meet* (saith he) *tendeth to poverty.* But men now seem to act as if they depended on
their

their own strength and wisdom, and were to live independent of religion and the providence of God ; and they also act as if some late experience had discovered the wisdom of Solomon's maxims to be of no avail, or not worth attending to. But certain it is, that whatever the pretences of men are, they cannot be happy without religion, nor can they be truly or properly religious without goodness : and experience confirms what a late writer said, that some men fancy themselves highly improved in virtue, and absolutely secure, (at least against every gross vice, whatever temptations to commit it they may happen to fall into) because at times they have very high notions of the beauty and amiableness of virtue, and of the deformity of every sinful passion and action : but they do not consider, that the worst of men, on some occasions, feel the same sentiments excited in their minds. But the sincerity and reality of virtue are to be measured by the good deeds they produce, by the general tenor of the life ; for if sentiments of virtue and duty do not govern the life, they do not make one really good ; because they do not render one really
 useful

useful and beneficial to mankind. If a man has not good sentiments, he cannot be virtuous; but in order to deserve the character of a virtuous man, his good sentiments must be a principle of action in him; a living, a moving, an active principle. The soundest faith, the best notions about God and virtue, are dead, (saith St. James) unless they shew themselves to be active, by the good fruits they bring forth.—“Faith without works is dead.” As others can have no evidence of our good principles, but by the advantages they reap from the good fruits of them in ourselves, so we are to prove our faith, our good principles and sentiments, our right notions of things, to ourselves, by our conduct and behaviour; not to flatter ourselves on account of the truth and reasonableness of our opinions, or of the warmth with which we at times contemplate virtue, but to call ourselves to an account for the good we actually do in consequence of these good principles; and then only to pronounce ourselves good, when we are really useful to society. It signifies but little how virtuous the head be, if the heart be not equally so. Virtue means a virtuous
temper,

temper, working habitually all the good it hath opportunity of doing ; a generous benevolent disposition, that controuleth every sensual appetite, and delights to exert itself in promoting, with unwearied assiduity, the best interest of mankind.—Every man hath it in his power, almost every day of his life, to do some good to society ; and it is what almost every page of christianity calls him to do ; not to forget, but to be ready to communicate ; and the least real good and service done to the least of Christ's disciples will not go unrewarded ; and consequently, a greater good done to those who are worthy of double honour, will meet with a greater recompence of reward : and therefore, for men to say, and pretend to believe, they have no opportunity or power to do good, is, in effect, to say, and believe, what God has commanded, and what the gospel enjoins men to do, is impossible to be done. Let christians consider then, whether it be not indolence, or covetousness, instead of poverty and inability, which prompts them to make excuses, and which keeps them from allowing their ministers a proper maintenance. O sirs, be persuaded to trust God

more, and yourselves (or rather your riches) less. Entertain a real love for religion, and for the ministers of the gospel; and do the best you can to support your ministers, this being a very good way to support religion, and to revive the spirit of it: and is it not the way to procure the favour of God? For can you reasonably think, (if you neglect that which God has enjoined) that you shall meet with the divine blessing, either upon yourselves, your families, or upon your temporal or spiritual concerns?—they that are wise are able to judge.—Thus have I offered you my real thoughts upon this tender subject; and it is for your real honour and happiness in this and in the future world: it is from love to you, to God, and for the revival of religion, (and not for any private or selfish ends) that I have been induced to write, to exhort you to a faithful discharge of duty towards your ministers: and my desire and prayer is, that you may be enabled to do it unto the end. *Amen.*

PART THE FOURTH.

Being a Discourse upon various Moral and Religious Subjects. In several **DIALOGUES**, between a **PRIMITIVE** and a **MODERN CHRISTIAN**.

The conversation introduced by the
MODERN CHRISTIAN.

AY! what, my old friend! Bless my soul, who should have thought of seeing you here among mortals? Well, since it is so happy that we are here together, we cannot better employ our time of stay, than to spend it in a friendly conversation, on some moral and religious subjects; for how much soever we may amuse our minds with the perishing things of this life, religious and moral things justly claim our first and principal regard; for what can be conceived to be of greater moment to such frail short-sighted creatures as we are, beset with so many snares, trials, and temptations, surrounded with troubles, sorrows, and calamities,

lamicities, so various, which so deeply depress and overload us, that sometimes we are hardly able to maintain and support a chearful frame of mind; especially under some of the darkest seasons and sharpest trials of human life, we are ready to cast off faith and trust in God and his promises, and a firm dependence on his providence. Can any thing then concern us more, than often to revive a conversation upon those subjects, which may tend to direct us in our enquiries after truth and right conduct, that our faith and hope may be strengthened under every circumstance which we, by the hand and direction of providence, may be brought into?—We may be in heaviness at present, through manifold temptations; yet under all the various scenes of life, and instances of providence, we may see the graciousness of our Maker, and from thence learn some new lesson of obedience.—The great and constant effects of his power and providence call for our constant and serious attention: his power, wisdom, and goodness, in creating us what we are—his constant preserving hand of providence, in giving us all things richly to enjoy—his love, which was be-

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yond

yond all comparison manifested in the gift of his Son, and the assurance of a redemption from the graves of the earth, ratified and made good by his own resurrection from the dead—the promise of pardon and remission of sin, through his blood—and the promise of the assistance of the Holy Spirit of God, together with all the spiritual blessings in heavenly things in Christ, with which we are blessed—are all powerful and constraining motives to a warmth of zeal and love towards Almighty God and the Redeemer, to engage us to aspire after an imitation of the righteousness and goodness of the Creator, and to kindle in us a rapturous joy, a holy and heavenly frame.—We cannot think too highly of the power of God, which is absolute, uncontrollable, infinite, and irresistible; for “who can stay God’s hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?” The power of God, how wonderful! how great is he! worthy to receive glory and honour, who hath created all things for his good pleasure. And when we consider and behold the majesty of the Lord, and the operations of his hands, and that he has universal nature at his command;
for

for he telleth the number of the stars, and calleth them all by their names; he covereth the heaven with clouds, and prepareth rain for the earth; he giveth snow like wool, and scattereth the hoar frost like ashes—he stretcheth out the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing—he bindeth up the waters in his thick clouds, and the cloud is not rent under them—he removeth the mountains, and they know it not, he overturneth them in his anger, he shaketh the earth out of her place, and the pillars thereof tremble—he hath measured the waters in the bollow of his hand, and meted out the heaven with a span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance.—When we consider (I say) and behold these operations of the divine power, we cannot conceive too high of him, nor think too low and mean of ourselves.—We may say, “What
 “ is man, that the Lord should be mind-
 “ ful of him, or the son of man, that he
 “ should visit him?” Can men, who are but dust and worms, ascribe too much to the power of God? The potter has power over the clay, to choose (arbitrarily) out of

the same mass, materials to form vessels, some for great, others for less use—so the power and dominion of God are over his creatures. The supreme architect, out of the same matter, may arbitrarily modify the properties and perfections of his creatures—none can say, Why hast thou made me thus? —It therefore becomes us to acknowledge the absolute power of God in the originally different make and order of his creatures; and also the power and dominion of Almighty God, in the government of the world, is what we should humbly acknowledge: the state of health or sickness, riches or poverty, and various other such like circumstances, are subject to the divine disposal and direction. But vain, mortal, thoughtless men may imagine, that the different states and conditions in which they are, is owing to their own sagacity and prudence, without acknowledging the sovereign agency of divine providence: but in direct opposition to this, the psalmist declares, that “ promotion cometh not from the east,
 “ nor from the west, nor from the south;
 “ but God is judge; he pulleth down one,
 “ and setteth up another.” Agreeable to which,

which, the wise man observeth, “ that the
 “ lot is cast into the lap, but the whole dis-
 “ posing thereof is of the Lord:” and
 again, “ the race (saith he) is not to the swift,
 “ nor the battle to the strong, neither yet
 “ bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men
 “ of understanding, nor yet favour to men
 “ of skill; but time and chance happeneth
 “ to them all.” God, who is the supreme
 creator of all things, is also the wise su-
 preme governor of all; all nature is at his
 command; he directs all, according to the
 counsels of his own wisdom, and to his
 own glory: nothing can happen, or come
 to pass, without his permission: God
 steers and directs every thing, which
 way he pleaseth; “ a man’s heart de-
 “ viseth his ways, but the Lord directeth
 “ his steps:” and the prophet declares, “ I
 “ know that the way of man is not in him-
 “ self, it is not in man that walketh to di-
 “ rect his steps.” From which we may
 safely conclude, that we cannot ascribe too
 much to the power and providence of the
 supreme Deity. As all true religion is
 founded and built upon a firm and stedfast
 faith in the power and providence of God,

so without it, all pretensions to religion are vain and insignificant; for if there be any such thing as true religion, it must be grounded in the knowledge and belief of God, and must be preserved by his almighty power: all the scantlings of human power and wisdom are not able to support a spirit of religion, without the actual exertion of the power of God, and the agency of his providence.—All nature, and religion too, must be unhinged without it.—Thus, my good friend, I have offered you my sincere thoughts upon some few material subjects, and which, upon enquiry, I humbly conceive, will be found to accord with primitive christianity: however that be, I submit them to your animadversion.

PRIMITIVE CHRISTIAN.

My good sir, I can assure you, that I am heartily glad to find one, in these latter ages, (“ where iniquity doth abound, and the “ love of many waxeth cold ”) willing and ready to encourage a conversation on subjects the most interesting; and I do sincerely rejoice to see, that corruption of manners has not so far prevailed, as to suppress a free inquiry after truth; and that the mean principles

ticles of ambition, worldly honour, and preferment, (which are nothing but mere shades of true happiness) have not so far clouded the mind, as to swallow up all love of the truth. The love of truth, indeed, is what almost all pretend to; and yet it is to be feared, that many, like Pilate, say, What is truth? and, like him, go away without any solicitous concern to purchase it, or, as the wise man exhorts, “to buy the truth, “and sell it not.” But as no man can be any loser by knowing the truth, so no man ought to be indifferent in searching after it, nor yet assent to any thing as truth, without evidence for it, especially that which is of a religious kind: and every one, in his enquiries after truth, ought to suspect himself; for self-conceitedness generally prevents improvement and progress: it is much safer for any one to be diffident of himself, than too dogmatical; rather to think too low, than too high of his own understanding. But it by no means follows from hence, that he is obliged to give up his reason to the dictates of others, and implicitly depend upon their authority; but it is his express duty, as a reasonable creature, to consider,

examine, judge, and determine for himself, according to the evidence laid before him. The Scriptures in particular demand of every one a serious and careful examination; and consequently, whatever is there plainly enjoined, as the subject of faith or duty, we are to submit to, how much soever modern opinions and customs may differ from it. But the great misfortune is, men are too apt to take up with a set of their own, or others principles, without being at any (at least sufficient) pains to examine whether they be christian principles, or the inventions of men, and so pass on, year after year, with a superficial view of religion, without entering into the bottom and grounds of those principles they have established as religious—and every one is ready to pronounce his own principles to be truly primitive and orthodox principles, when perhaps at the same time they are mere hodge-podge, or confused jumble.—However that be, pardon this digression, and I will now proceed candidly to examine and consider what you have advanced.

That we cannot ascribe too much to the power of God, so far as is consistent with
his

his holiness, and other moral perfections, is very true: but we are not to conceive or entertain such notions of his power as destroy the freedom of mens actions. He deals with us as moral agents—as intelligent beings—and as the subjects of liberty and choice. The rule and measure of the divine government is not founded in capricious humour, or arbitrary will. Wisdom and goodness is the invariable rule and standard of all God's actions and conduct towards men; and consequently, true religion cannot be founded in arbitrary will or pleasure, but, on the contrary, in the moral fitness of things: it consists in the agreeableness to the nature, relation, and circumstances of men; and as men are invested with reason and understanding, they must employ and exercise it, before they can be the proper subjects of religion. Neither true nor false principles of religion can subsist without some degree of reason and understanding, to discern and judge of the fitness or unfitness of things. Neither can men be justly called religious or irreligious, believers or unbelievers, unless they have a power given them to form their judgment according to the
nature

nature of the evidence produced in favour of or against the truth of religion.—The father and origin of all things, the gracious governor and kind benefactor of all creatures, a being of holiness, justice, mercy, love, and goodness, will, without doubt, deal with men according to the degrees of reason and understanding given to them, and according to the good or bad use they make of the same. The Scriptures abundantly assure us, that this will be the method of proceeding at the final day of judgment. If “ the Father, without respect of persons, (as St. Peter declares) judgeth according to every man’s works ;” and if, according to another apostle, “ we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad :” If (I say) these are the reasons and grounds for a judgment to take place ; and if, when the final upshot comes, when all the world are called together, rewards and punishments will be distributed to every one according to the strict rules of equity and justice ; it is evident, beyond contradiction, that God does

does not act an arbitrary, partial, or cruel part by any of his creatures.—Though he has all power, and all nature at his command, yet he does not compel men to act this way or that; he leaves them to their own choice, to act well or ill; he does not restrain or over-rule their active powers: God has given men an express revelation of his will, in which certain duties are enjoined upon them, as conditions of their being meet for that state of happiness and glory which he has promised; and yet God does not work in and for men the works he has enjoined, if they be wholly wanting to themselves; nor shall they see the salvation of God, if they do not make a wise and diligent use of the means providence blesses them with. He does not deal with us, or by us, as unintelligent machines, but as reasonable creatures: he does not make us happy without our own knowledge, choice, and concurrence, which indeed would be a contradiction; neither does he wholly leave us to ourselves, without forming in us, and exciting us to, a holy and heavenly frame of mind: he does not abandon us with some superinducements, nor do the means we have,

have, happen to us according to the laws of mechanism, or by a fixed chain of natural causes, without any act of a respective providence, without any superintendency and direction of events; which, to all human views, would be living in a fatherless world, exposed to ten thousand casualties and distresses which no foresight can prevent, nor skill or power fence off. But then, if it be admitted that the merciful Father of our spirits does at any time hold a direct and immediate communication with the mind, or appoints the same to be maintained by any being whatsoever, no other account can be given of it (consistent with his perfect wisdom, and the regular and harmonious operations of his providence) than this, that it is in a way agreeable to human nature, soft and persuasive; not controuling or obstructing the free use of reason, but by the help of the understanding alone, influencing the will, and moderating all the affections. It is true, nothing is more agreeable to finite dependent beings, nothing more cherishing and animating to such feeble minds, than a firm belief of some sort of communication and special dictates from heaven to our minds:

minds : but then we ought to be very cautious in guarding against the persuasion of any special communication with the Deity, so as to indulge and nourish in our minds pride and too great extravagance of conceitedness, and so set up in our minds any other guide, instead of reason, and to which moral conscience must give place. This would be the direct way to unhinge virtue, and all moral obligations, and the very frame of human nature.—The power of God, therefore, and the agency of his providence, are not exercised in a way contrary to that sphere of activity and agency allotted to men.—Indeed he may, consistently with his wisdom and goodness, make some men wiser than others : he may endow them with larger degrees of understanding, and they may have faculties and natural capacities for more enlarged schemes of happiness, and may have leisure, and be so placed, as to be greater blessings to society than others : and God may also make some beings wiser than the wisest of the sons of men ; he may place them in a higher rank and order of existence, and they may be made for happiness of a more pure kind than men, and be less ex-
posed

posed to misery. In these and such like instances, the Supreme Being may act according to his sovereign will, without the least impeachment of his wisdom or goodness; and no man has any right to repine against his Maker for so doing. As men are furnished with different capacities and opportunities for their improvement in virtue and usefulness, so different duties are required of them, in proportion to their respective powers: but where mens capacities, talents, and opportunities, are alike, we see they do not act alike; which, by the way, is a proof in favour of human agency, or in other words, that although the Creator has made men what they are, in regard to their natural abilities, yet he has nevertheless given them liberty to act as they please, and to attain to different moral qualifications, which depend upon their own application and improvement: and as God has an absolute right and prerogative to make what sort of beings he pleases, and to endow and invest them with such capacities for usefulness as seems best to him, without the least impeachment of his goodness, so he may deprive men of life, and the means they enjoy, whenever he pleases; and

and though he acts according to his sovereign will, in taking away that life and understanding which he has freely bestowed upon them; yet as life, and every other endowment of nature, are the free gifts of God, his goodness is not in the least lessened, by depriving men of those blessings they are invested with: but so long as reason and understanding are continued to them, they must exercise them; and there must be choice in all their actions, if there be any difference between good and evil, right and wrong: If there be any beauty in holiness of life, or any moral rectitude and purity of heart, or any deformity in vice, or impurity in debauchery and sensual pleasures—in a word, if there be any right and wrong paths, prudent or imprudent measures, to be taken; the first leading (by gradual steps) to moral perfections and happiness, and the latter to vice, remorse, and misery; there must be reason and understanding to judge of those different measures, and also freedom of action, before there can be due any praise or blame, merit or demerit, in any of the steps of moral behaviour: for if you divest man of his reason, he then no longer remains a subject

ject to reason and argue with; all intreaty, argument, and persuasion, to the most evident truths in natural or revealed religion, is of no use: and suppose you do allow him to have reason, and to be a proper subject to reason and talk with, yet if you divest him of choice, all your conversation with him must be as insignificant as if he had no reason at all: besides, without choice, the virtuous and obedient man can have no claim or hope for any reward, unless it be founded in the will of an arbitrary Being; nor yet can the wicked one deserve any punishment for what he had no power to avoid; so you must acknowledge, that a doctrine which directly (or in its consequences) destroys freedom of thought and action, can never be a primitive apostolic doctrine, but must be of a later date; for the apostles, you know, went from place to place, to establish in the minds of men a principle of sincerity and real goodness; they laboured and exerted their best endeavours and efforts to persuade men to forsake their vices, and to grow wiser and better: and why? the reason is clear; because they knew that those to whom they recommended the gospel, were

were capable of judging of its truth, merit, and importance, and of complying with its directions. The apostles did not say to men (as some modern preachers do) that they have no power to act—that they are all dead lumps of clay, and that they could no more act for their spiritual food, than a man in his grave can for his temporal : but their doctrine was quite different ; for it is an evident truth, that the apostles called upon men to a vigorous discharge of duty, “ to put off the works of darkness,” and all evil habits and customs, and to live according to the rules of reason and religion.—Pure primitive christianity, therefore, consisted in mens being sincerely pious, honest, fair and just, sober and temperate : and such who did conform to the spirit of christianity were of a benign, generous, liberal, and merciful spirit ; not covetous, selfish, and uncharitable.—And now, pray tell me, whether it did not cost them some labour and pains to acquire the spirit of religion, and to practise accordingly ? Is it not a work and business which requires a due and constant exercise of the mind ? Is it not what we are all called to, “ to search the

“ Scriptures ; to examine whether we are in
 “ the faith, that we may not receive the grace
 “ of God in vain ?” And does it not depend
 on our own choice, whether we do, or do not,
 think or concern ourselves about religion,
 and that work and business which relates to
 our future and immortal happiness ? If it be
 entirely out of our own power to think about
 religion, and to attain to such qualifications
 as will be a meetness for divine approbation,
 say, why are we made thus ? and why are
 we called to any duty at all ?—Say, “ who
 “ is the Lord, that we should serve him ?
 “ or what profit shall we have, if we pray
 “ unto him ?”—It therefore can never be
 made consistent with the divine perfections,
 nor yet with primitive christianity, to sup-
 pose we have no choice nor liberty to act.
 If there be a first cause, as all the works
 and the harmonious operations of nature
 loudly proclaim ; if this first cause and su-
 preme Lord of all be just, and his word
 true, men must be moral intelligent be-
 ings, and accountable to God ; and if ac-
 countable for what they now do, they must
 be at liberty to act ; or else what, in the
 name

name of truth, can they be accountable for ?

Thus, my good christian friend, I have delivered my sentiments upon an important point of religion, and in which the honour of genuine and primitive christianity is deeply concerned ; and now I recommend what has been advanced to your serious consideration. If Providence permit, we will, to-morrow evening, resume this, or commence a conversation upon some other subject. May Providence preserve us both from all evil. I am yours,

The PRIMITIVE CHRISTIAN.

DIALOGUE THE SECOND.

The Conference begun by the MODERN
CHRISTIAN.

My Dear Friend,

I Am overjoyed to see you this evening.—
Another opportunity offers to resume
our conversation.—Near twenty-four hours
have elapsed since we parted; in which in-
terval of time, I have deeply pondered in my
heart what you said to me, and have also
closely examined and considered several parts
of holy Scripture relating to the subject, that
I might be satisfied that the use of reason
was necessary in matters of religion; and
whether, by admitting it, the exercise of
reason does depend on our own choice, or
whether, by denying it, I should run coun-
ter to primitive christianity.— Without
telling you at this time what discoveries I
have made by this recollection of thought,
or what benefit I have reaped by such a short
survey—I will now presume to ask you,
how

how free you would have men be? Whether free enough to choose and refuse successively the same thing, under the same considerations? I mean, that the thing be not only in itself the same, but that the person who chooses and refuses, thinks the same of it, when he chooses, as when he refuses.—Does not every man, of necessity, strike out and follow such paths as he foresees will turn to his own advantage? and embrace every opportunity, and pursue every such measure, as he cannot but foresee will bring him to the enjoyment of the greatest good?—And does not the same necessity oblige him to avoid every such step and tenor of action as he foresees will destroy his own inward felicity, or which of consequence must bring him to it?—And does it not from hence follow, that if mens powers, talents, and circumstances, are the same, that their actions must be so too? or in other words, where mens abilities and circumstances are alike, that then they cannot act differently. Suppose, for instance, I have always the same ideas about future happiness or misery, which are wrapped up in some distant objects, must I not, of necessity,

always invariably pursue the same course of acting, to obtain the happiness, and to avoid the misery : if I change my pursuit, and vary in my acting, I must change my ideas, or I must have different apprehensions about it : if I change and vary in my conduct, from hence it seems undeniably to appear, that I am under a necessity to follow such a course as to the best of my knowledge will end in my greatest good ; or if I do act contrary to this rule, is it not because some present object, passion, inclination, or temptation, clouds and darkens my understanding, by which I lose sight of that happiness which I before had in view ; from hence it appears, that I am necessitated to act as I do, because I always invariably follow my own understanding, and judge, determine, and act according to the apprehensions that I have ; and I cannot choose the good, nor yet the evil, but according to the incentives to either :—for if the incentives to virtue and happiness be the stronger, I must, of necessity, be excited by them ; but if incentives to evil and misery be the most powerful, how can I avoid being led and influenced by the strongest motives ?—However, if I

am

am mistaken in so important a point, I hope you will teach me wherein I have erred, and, upon conviction, am ready to relinquish what is erroneous, and to close in with truth.—

PRIMITIVE CHRISTIAN.

My Worthy Friend,

I have attended to what you have said, and it gives me no small pleasure to hear you deliver your sentiments so free and unreservedly; in which, perhaps, there may be some appearance and show of truth, yet I am persuaded, upon an impartial examination, it will be found to have no foundation either in reason or revelation; and as I have a sincere regard to the principles of true religion, and will do my best to secure and defend it from all false glosses and pretences whatsoever, I beg you will bear with me, while I am making out the following things.

First,—Religion is founded in the firm belief of a Deity, who is the creator and governor of all things; and all true religion must be agreeable to reason, and to the moral character of this supreme first cause; and

every system of, or principle in religion; which is repugnant to, or which tends to cut off and retrench from any perfections belonging to God, must be manifestly false; and without reason it is impossible to be of any religion, or to tell whether the principles of any religion do harmonize and coincide with the moral character of God, or whether they run counter to and clash with it.—To say we have no reason to judge and determine for ourselves, or that we have no choice to prefer one thing before another, is, in its consequences, allowing no difference between moral good and evil; “or at least “if a moral fitness of things” be admitted, it cannot belong to man, if he has no self-determining powers, but must relate to some other class of beings; for if we are impelled to action, and the exercise of our reason be impeded by necessary determinations, we cannot possibly have any connection with any moral differences, a full power to choose or refuse, approve or disapprove, being essential to moral obligations; so that you must either allow, that we are at liberty to choose for ourselves, or that we have no sort of concern or connection with any moral distinctions.

Secondly,

Secondly,—Give me leave, Sir, to ask, whether man is not, by nature, a free agent? and doth it not evidently appear, that he hath liberty and will?—Doth not the great difference between him and brutes lie in this, that they are unavoidably constrained to act one way, while he hath always the power of determining this way or the other, choosing or refusing?—But now, if there be any such thing as incentives or inducements to sin, that are altogether insurmountable, there is an end of his freedom; for in those instances he acts as necessarily, as mechanically, or as involuntarily as the beasts that perish.—The great end and grand aim of man should be to please and glorify his Maker, by living according to the rules of reason and religion; and yet impossible it is that this can ever be attained, while he converses with temptations which he cannot surmount.—The creator of the world, and father of all rational beings, has made nothing in vain— all beings have power to fulfil the design of their creation—and can it then be thought that man alone is under an utter incapacity of reaching to that end? Is he only incapable

pable of arriving to perfection and happiness suitable to his nature?—How is he the glory of this visible world, if all other beings can fulfil the design of heaven, and he left quite destitute of that power?

Thirdly,—If reason be acknowledged to be a perfection or power superior in the scale of life to that of mere sensitive beings, the result must be, that reason ought to be upon the throne within us, set up and maintained by us as the judge and ruler from which all our inferior affections ought to receive their orders, and to which they ought to be subject and accountable;—for if reason be our natural dignity, our supreme excellency, and that which constitutes us a superior rank of beings, above those which have no such governing principle, the consequence must be, that we only maintain this our superior excellency in proportion as reason presides, rules and directs us; for we are either reasonable beings, or we are not; if the latter, we have nothing to do with any laws, government, or religion; all which may be exceeding good to a class of beings, endued with reason and judgment to discern its worth and excellence.—But if
we

we are reasonable beings, and moral agents, it is self-evident that laws, governments, and religion, are subjects which claim the exercise of our reason ; and it is by our reason that we can discern that some laws, governments, and religions, are calculated for more general usefulness than others ; and I think it is hardly possible for any man to say that we have no determination to approve or disapprove ; if we experience approbation and disapprobation, then we must have an approving and disapproving faculty ; and approbation and disapprobation always supposes their object to be matter of voluntary and free choice ; for we neither approve nor disapprove ourselves, but when we are conscious that what we do is our own voluntary deed, as we can neither applaud nor condemn ourselves for good or bad actions, if we do not, nor cannot of ourselves, concur to the doing of them. Permit me then to ask, whether you ever had any sort of satisfaction, joy, or pleasure, in the prosperity and happiness of others ? or any sort of uneasiness, grief, or pity, in their misery and misfortunes ? Does a change of circumstances and conditions of men make any
change

change in your mind?—Can you “ weep
 “ with them that weep, or rejoice with
 “ them that rejoice?” Is it not reason and
 understanding, with which you are invested,
 that directs you to these different affections,
 upon these different occasions? And is it not
 from a conscious sense of your own choice,
 which creates in your mind pleasure or pain,
 upon these different conditions of men?
 And is it not from the same cause, that you
 show any approbation of any remarkable in-
 stances of piety, virtue, or benevolence? or
 any disapprobation of impiety, viciousness, and
 cruelty?—If it be not from this cause,—if ap-
 probation or disapprobation on these differ-
 ent scenes of life does not spring or flow from
 a consciousness of choice, there can be no
 merit in your best actions, or demerit in your
 worst; for on this supposition they must ap-
 pear alike; or else, when you do well or ill,
 you do but fulfil the order and command of
 nature, and of consequence you are not a pro-
 per subject of reward or punishment; for no
 man ever thinks of blaming his clock or watch
 for any irregularity; and if no man did ever
 think or can think of blaming his clock or
 watch for any irregularity, can you possibly
 think

think that any wise man will ever once let it enter into his thoughts, that God, the righteous Father and governor of the world, will blame, or lay any thing to the charge of his creature man, because he mechanically steps from the paths of virtue :—mechanically, I say, because, if he has no choice or freedom of his own, but acts by necessity, or by some secret irresistible impulses, he acts (if he does act) by the laws of mechanism. —If you then persuade me to think, or believe, that I have no choice of liberty to act, and that I must act as I do, I shall immediately question whether my own being and whole life be any thing else but a dream or vision—for denying or questioning freedom of thought and action, directly leads to scepticism itself, there being as much reason to disbelieve every thing, as to disbelieve reason and moral agency.

Fourthly,—It is to be feared, that some persons have been led into infidelity, because many christians themselves have endeavoured to support the wild opinion of man's absolute impotency in religious matters, from the word of God.—But christianity, separate from all human articles, is
entirely

entirely free from this charge ; and the greatest cause of mens running into scepticism and infidelity, is not because christians themselves hold and maintain inconsistencies, but because hesitation, doubting, hardness of heart, and difficulty of being persuaded and convinced in religious matters, is owing to, and may, among other causes, be justly ascribed to a fear and dread of religious truths, and the consequences of them ; for if the great truths of religion did not, by an unavoidable consequence, conclude against wicked men, if they had no manner of influence upon their eternal happiness or misery—if they ended barely in truth or falsehood, without any farther views—if they were matters of pure speculation, there is no question but that they would yield their assent to them.—But alas, christianity carries the strongest evidence imaginable of a future state ; a future state of rewards and punishment, is as evident as the existence of a first cause—and every man will most assuredly receive according to his works done in this life.—This, this is the clear voice of nature, and the evident language of Scripture—all the noise and bustle in the world can never extinguish
this

this principle of natural and revealed religion. If there be a God, if we believe that he is, we must also believe that he is a rewarder of all them which diligently seek him : but where can the propriety and consistency of this be, if men were mere blind necessary agents?—Ah ! what, a reasonable creature, and a christian, believe that men are necessary agents, and yet at the same time believe a future day of retribution !—believe, if it be possible — believe that God, the righteous judge and compassionate father of the world, will bestow upon one part (a few) of his creatures, eternal life and glory, for no other reason or cause but because he, from all eternity, arbitrarily determined and elected them to it, without any regard or consideration to their behaviour; and upon the same rule, (or rather without any rule) the greatest part are excluded his favour—believe this, I say, if you can. If it be belief, it must, it can be nothing but an empty speculative (not a real) belief—I say, empty belief ; because it is entirely destitute of any argument from reason to support it, and hardly so much as
any

any colour of argument in Scripture for it.

Fifthly,—You ask, “how free you would have men be?—whether free enough to choose and refuse successively the same thing, under the same consideration?”—In answer, it must be admitted, that we are so free, or so much at liberty, as to keep from a habit of sin. If we have not this choice, we have no choice at all, and we are constantly exhorted in the word of God “to keep ourselves pure and undefiled,” to no purpose—and therefore there can be no danger nor inconsistency in admitting and maintaining, that we are so free, or so much at liberty, as to choose and refuse, immediately one time after another, the same thing, under the same consideration, or when circumstances are the same; I mean, we may choose the good, when motives to it are the same as when we refused it; and we may choose the evil, when the temptation or excitement to it is no stronger, or any other, than when we refused it, or overcame it.—And besides, men do not always act according to the apprehension they have, or the judgment they form of the thing choosed or refused;

refused ; for they know, at the time when they do choose and refuse, that their choice, and the consequence of their acting, will not prove beneficial, but prejudicial to themselves and society ; for every man must know, that is addicted to drunkenness, that the habit of this vice will be injurious to his pocket, and the health of his body, and tranquillity of his mind ; and he who at any time commits a robbery, must know that this will prove prejudicial to society : so that you cannot but see, that men do act contrary to light and knowledge ; and the apparent reason why they do thus act, is, because they love the momentary pleasures and profits of sin, and prefer them to the manly pleasures of virtue and religion : — their minds and affections are depraved and corrupted by habit and use. — Thus I have, for the present, given a sufficient answer to what you have advanced, and shall now leave it to your farther consideration.

MODERN CHRISTIAN.

My Christian Brother,

Whether those inferences which you have drawn from this scheme of necessary agency be sound reasoning, or be just or not, is what I shall not take upon me to dispute at present : but as religion is a matter of such public concern, and Scripture the source and fountain from whence every religious principle is supposed to have its birth and authority, I beg you would let the following passages, connected with the subject, have their just weight.—It is said, *Rom. viii. 7.* that “ the carnal mind is enmity against God.”—And in *1 Cor. i. 19, 20.* the apostle says,—“ It is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the disputer of this world ? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world ?”—Again, *1 Cor. ii. 14.* the apostle tells us, that “ the natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God ; for they are foolishness unto him ; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”—

Again,

Again, in the iii. of this epistle, 18, 19, 20th ver. " Let no man deceive himself : if any
 " man among you seemeth to be wise in
 " this world, let him become a fool, that
 " he may be wise. For the wisdom of this
 " world is foolishness, with God : for it is
 " written, He taketh the wise in their own
 " craftiness : and again, The Lord knoweth
 " the thoughts of the wise, that they are
 " but vain."—And again, in 2 *Cor.* x. 4, 5.
 " —For the weapons of our warfare are
 " not carnal, but mighty through God, to
 " the pulling down of strong holds, cast-
 " ing down imaginations, and every high
 " thing that exalteth itself against the know-
 " ledge of God, and bringing into captivity
 " every thought to the obedience of Christ."
 —And once more, 2 *Pet.* i. 20, 21st ver.
 " Knowing this first, that no prophecy of
 " the Scripture is of any private interpreta-
 " tion. For the prophecy came not in old
 " time by the will of man : but holy men
 " of God spake as they were moved by the
 " Holy Ghost."—Having recited the ex-
 press passages of Scripture, as an answer to
 your reasoning against necessary agency, I
 hope they will claim your most serious at-

tention and regard—for whatever you have said, or can say, against my scheme, as debasing human beings, and as repugnant to the moral character of God, I can never think so of it, unless you can rationally, and consistently, make out and illustrate these passages, consistent with what you contend for—for I pay a greater regard to the word of God, than I do to all the men in the world; and therefore a clear interpretation of them will give infinite pleasure and satisfaction to your friend.

PRIMITIVE CHRISTIAN.

I am (my good Sir) sincerely glad to hear you make this fair proposal, to rest the debate upon a clear and impartial illustration of those few (and which I suppose are the most material or main) passages of Scripture, on which your scheme is hinged—for whether I am, or am not, able to give a consistent and satisfying answer, the proposal itself supposes the use of reason.—“ For
 “ whatsoever” (says an excellent writer)
 “ any man alledges against reason’s being
 “ made a judge, is either agreeable to my
 “ reason,

“ reason, or it is not: if it be, he makes
 “ reason a judge; if it be not, he disputes
 “ in vain against reason;—for the end of
 “ disputation is to bring over others to our
 “ opinion, by proper arguments; but this
 “ cannot be done, unless our arguments be
 “ agreeable to his reason with whom we dis-
 “ pute.”——Again, either we suppose the
 person with whom we dispute to understand
 the reasons we urge for his conviction, or
 not: if the first, we own reason to be a
 judge; if the second, we dispute in vain,
 or to no purpose, and may as well and as
 profitably entertain the deaf and blind with
 sounds and colours.—He that argues against
 this use of reason, thinks that he reasons
 either rightly or wrongly: if he thinks he
 reasons rightly, how can he condemn the
 judgment of reason? if wrongly, how can
 he hope to convince others by that which he
 does not believe himself?

Again, when Scripture is urged against
 the use of our own reason and judgment,
 in interpreting of Scripture, I ask those who
 thus argue, how they know that the passages
 of Scripture which they alledge against this
 use of reason, are pertinent, and prove what

they are brought for?—This can be known only by the help of their own reason and judgment; and if they rely upon their own sense and reason, in interpreting these texts of Scripture, why may they not as well do so in others, and make the same use of reason in reading Scriptures which they do in studying other books, since the Scriptures were wrote for the same end which other books are, the instruction and improvement of mankind?

—Thus you see, that whatever the objections are which discard the use of our reason in interpreting Scripture, or any religious matters, contradict and overthrow themselves—and do really establish the use of reason which they attempt to undermine.—Indeed if there be any force in objections of this kind, there is an end of all discourse and argument whatsoever, and every man must be left to the enjoyment of his own opinions, however erroneous or absurd—since upon this supposition, that reason is to be discarded, it is in vain to endeavour to convince him. — Having premised these remarks, I shall now proceed to a particular illustration of those passages

sages of Scripture which you have brought against the use of reason.

The first is, where it is said, " The carnal mind is enmity against God."—But this does not appear to be of any weight, or to the purpose, to prove any thing against the exercise of reason.—The apostle says nothing against, or in the least disparages the reason or mind of man; for the mind or reason of man is one thing, and his ungoverned lustful, sensual, animal, or carnal affections quite another. The carnal mind, or to be carnally minded, signifies the bent of our mind, or a total voluntary subjection to the fulfilling the lusts of the flesh, which another apostle says, " war against the " soul," and consequently is " enmity " against God."—But the very same apostle which says, " fleshly lusts war against the " soul," exhorts and beseeches christians to " abstain from them;" which exhortation can have no force, unless men can employ and exercise their reason. Indeed our reason may be degraded, overpowered, born down, immersed, and swallowed up, by fleshly appetites and brutal lusts; which is the same thing as the apostle means by the

carnal mind : but this does not prove that we have no reason, and that we cannot employ and exercise our rational faculties aright.—We may have reason, and yet by following the sensual enjoyments of this world become carnal in our minds ; our reason may be as much over-run and over-powered by sensuality, as some choice fruit or tree in a garden may be by weeds, thorns, and briars, and notwithstanding this, the fruit may be effectually restored by proper culture, and the rooting up all noxious weeds.

The second passage is, 1 *Cor.* i. 19, 20. The apostle here refers to a passage in *Isaiah*—but his design in quoting it was not to discourage the use of reason.—The occasion of these words was this : there were at *Corinth* several false apostles, who opposed and endeavoured to undermine the credit of *Saint Paul*, and the gospel of *Christ* ; and some of the *Corinthians* were ready to boast and glory in these false preachers.—*St. Paul* endeavoured therefore to take off the force of their arguments, and tells the people to this effect, that neither any advantage of extraction, nor skill in the learning of the *Jews*,
nor

nor in the philosophy and eloquence of the Gentiles, was that for which God chose men to be preachers of the gospel; but those whom he made choice of, for overturning the mighty and the learned, were plain and illiterate men.—The true meaning of the apostle is, the dispensation of the grace of God in the gospel, and that method of salvation for mankind, is what no human reason or natural light could ever have discovered.

— And then, if this be the meaning of the apostle, the most that can be inferred from his reasoning in this place, is, that as the gospel dispensation was not discoverable by the light of nature, but is the will and appointment of Almighty God, consequently we must exercise our reason, and examine this revelation of the grace of God in the Messiah, that it may be found “unto every one that believeth, the power and wisdom of God.”

The third passage is in 1 *Cor.* ii. 14. where the apostle tells us, that “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they

“ they are spiritually discerned.” — The apostle, I apprehend, continues his argument, and means by the natural man, the same as the carnal ; a sensual, vicious person ; one who has no relish of, or taste to, the pleasures of religion, and the things of God. The things of religion, and the truths of the gospel, are, to a man that values nothing so much as the things of this world, foolishness, “ neither can he know them, “ because they are spiritually discerned ;” that is, he wants another disposition, he must be changed and renewed in his spirit, or in the temper and spirit of his mind, before he can relish spiritual things ; such a one is not a proper person to investigate the truths of christianity ; he is not likely to arrive to a knowledge of God, while he continues a slave to his appetites.

However, whatever the apostle might mean by the natural man, he says nothing against the reason of man, or the use and exercise of it ; for this person, called “ the “ natural man,” is capable of reasoning and judging for himself, otherwise the things of God could not be said to be “ foolishness “ unto him.” He must know something
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about them, or else he could determine nothing about it. He passes a wrong judgment indeed, because he is led away by his vicious pleasures and passions ; and for that he is justly blameable, but not for making use of his reason and judgment.

The next passage, in the next chapter, ver. 18, 19, 20. being a continuation of the same subject and design, cannot want any farther illustration : the apostle only speaks against the cunning and craftiness of the false apostle, and not against true wisdom, human reason, and private judgment.

As to the other passage, 2 *Cor.* x. 4, 5, &c. where the apostle says, “ the weapons of “ our warfare are not carnal,” he cannot be understood to be arguing against the exercise of reason—for if the apostle means by the “ weapons of his warfare,” that simplicity, honesty, and sincerity, with which he preached the gospel of Christ ; that he was not influenced by carnal or worldly interest, nor yet used any artful eloquence, “ or enticing words of man’s wisdom ;”—it is evident, that the person who makes use of this plain unaffected method to propagate the principles of true religion—must have
reason,

reason, to judge of the best method, and must also exercise reason, in order to direct it to the best advantage ; and the persons to whom the gospel is addressed must have reason and understanding, in order to judge of the worth and excellency of revelation, and these spiritual things contained in the gospel. The things which regard the interest of the soul, and the happiness of another life, are things, or principles, so far from being contrary or opposite to reason, that they carry with them the best and highest reason in the world ; and there is no more opposition between these principles and reason, than there is between weapons and the hand that uses them.

The last passage is in 2 *Pet.* i. 20, 21. In order to illustrate this text, and to give all possible satisfaction, I shall quote an excellent author upon the passage, which is to the following effect :—" From this text
 " some will infer, that we cannot under-
 " stand the meaning of Scripture, without
 " the particular gift and extraordinary as-
 " sistance of that Spirit which indited it ;
 " and that the Spirit excludes all use of our
 " own reason in this matter.—But neither of
 " these

“ these points can be concluded from this
 “ text ; for the apostle does not speak here
 “ of all Scripture in general, but only the
 “ prophecies of the Old Testament, which
 “ foretold things that were not to come to
 “ pass till a long time after, till the time of
 “ the Messiah. He does not speak of all
 “ the inspired writers of the Old Testa-
 “ ment, but only of the prophets, and
 “ shews what he had before said in his first
 “ epistle, chap. i. 10, 11. *Of which sal-*
 “ *vation the prophets have enquired and*
 “ *searched diligently, who prophesied of the*
 “ *grace that should come unto you ; searching*
 “ *what, or what manner of time the spirit*
 “ *of Christ which was in them did signify,*
 “ *when it testified before-hand the sufferings*
 “ *of Christ, and the glory that should fol-*
 “ *low.* The meaning of which is, that
 “ they did not understand, nor could they
 “ interpret their own prophecies, and were
 “ ignorant most of all of the time when
 “ they should be fulfilled.”

So that the private interpretation of pro-
 phesy here mentioned, by which is meant
 the prophets interpretation of their own pro-
 phecies, is not opposed to the illumination of
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reason, to judge of the best method, and must also exercise reason, in order to direct it to the best advantage ; and the persons to whom the gospel is addressed must have reason and understanding, in order to judge of the worth and excellency of revelation, and these spiritual things contained in the gospel. The things which regard the interest of the soul, and the happiness of another life, are things, or principles, so far from being contrary or opposite to reason, that they carry with them the best and highest reason in the world ; and there is no more opposition between these principles and reason, than there is between weapons and the hand that uses them.

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 the prophets interpretation of their own pro-
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the Spirit, but to the understanding of other men, especially to those to whom the gospel was more plainly revealed, or who lived under the gospel, and might therefore understand the meaning of those prophecies, though the prophets who uttered them did not.—Neither is all interpretation, and all understanding of the Scripture, here denied to the prophets themselves, but only a thorough and compleat knowledge of the hidden and mystical sense of it, as it related to the New Testament and the gospel covenant: but from this particular case no general argument can be drawn, to prove that no man can, by the help of his own reason, arrive at any degree of knowledge and understanding in the meaning of any part of Scripture whatever.

And if it be maintained, that those prophets were so forcibly moved and overpowered by the Holy Ghost, that neither the time nor place, neither the manner nor measure, of their prophecying, was at their own command; that they could not prophesy when or where or what they pleased; and that they uttered things without their knowing or thinking of them, without,

and many times against, their will and consent ; yet this does not prove that this was the case of the apostles, and other inspired persons, under the New Testament, nor yet always of the prophets of the Old Testament, but only when they uttered those prophecies which the apostle here refers to. In other cases, the Spirit of God did often accommodate itself to the will of those whom it inspired : *The spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets* ; so St. Paul tells the Corinthians, in his first epistle, chap. xiv. 32. where, by *spirits*, must be understood, the extraordinary communications of the Holy Spirit, which the apostle assures them they were so far masters of, that they might regulate and order them in such manner as should tend most to the edification of their assemblies ; they could, for instance, prophesy, one by one, ver. 31.—they could speak or leave off speaking as they pleased, they could arrive at any degree of necessary knowledge they had a mind to, by the help of the Spirit.

These things thus considered, make it self-evident, that the words of the apostle cannot be understood of all Scripture, and
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of all interpretation of Scripture, so as to exclude all men from all manner of knowledge and understanding of Scripture, by their own reason and judgment.—And now I will leave it to your consideration and perusal, to judge whether these several passages are not consistent with my whole scheme.

DIALOGUE THE THIRD.

Introduced by the MODERN CHRISTIAN.

Dear Brother,

SINCE we parted, I have had but little time to make an examination of that interpretation you have given of those several passages of Scripture which I laid before you; so that I am at present unable to make any reply to it.—But admitting what you have said to be true, (viz. that we have such powers and faculties given us, as to understand the will of Almighty God, as made known to us in the gospel, and that we may attain a sufficient knowledge of all the necessary principles and duties of christianity, by a proper exercise of our reason, and that we can, if we will, comply with the duties it enjoins) I will now beg leave to ask, Whether we have the same power and freedom to exercise and employ our minds upon religious subjects, in this state of degeneracy and corruption, as man had in his original

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and primitive state of innocency?—Common experience, and several passages of Scripture, appear to me strongly to prove the contrary. The weakness and defect of reason is confirmed by the errors and follies of men; and although it may be strongly contended for, that we retain a great share of our reason and freedom, yet it is not to be questioned but what reason is decayed, and is greatly enfeebled and impaired by the fall and sin of Adam; for what cause can any man imagine that such a depraved and corrupted state and condition that men are now in, should proceed from, if it be not from an original taint?—Can any man view and consider the many different methods and fashions of sinning against God—such as violating his eternal law of righteousness—the open violence and oppression of some, the secret fraud and treachery of others—on one hand lust and luxury, excess and debauchery—on the other, covetousness and extortion? At one time, hypocrisy and the mask of religion, and at other times a downright contempt of God and religion, and in a word, all manner of sin and wickedness, in all manner of shapes
and

and forms, at one or at some other time, have reigned and spread itself through all the empire of the rational world.—Can any man, I say, view all these different methods of sinning against the majesty of heaven, and at the same time question an original corruption and depravity of nature?—*From whence come wars and fightings among you, (says the apostle) come they not hence, even of your lusts, that war in your own members?*—And may I not add, from whence cometh lust? is it not from a depraved and originally corrupted root?—And besides, many other passages of Scripture prove the same doctrine.—The psalmist says of himself, *Behold I was shapen in wickedness, and in sin bath my mother conceived me.* Again says he, *The ungodly are froward from their mother's womb; as soon as they are born they go astray, and speak lies;* which must mean something innate and original.—And to the same purpose is the declaration of the apostle—*By one man's disobedience many were made sinners.* And again, says he, *I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin.* And again the apostle says,

We were by nature the children of wrath even as others.—These and such like passages of Scripture sufficiently and strongly prove the doctrine of original depravity to me, and to thousands besides—and I hope, so long as we have Scripture on our side, you will think all of us right in holding and maintaining such a doctrine.

PRIMITIVE CHRISTIAN.

Sir,

In a matter of such importance as religion is, no man ought to hastily receive any thing for truth, without sufficient evidence for it, neither can he justify himself for so doing; and if any man, or set of men, were to take upon them to affirm any thing to be doctrines of christianity, on account of their being orthodox principles, and had been established by the consent of able, worthy, and learned men, for five or six centuries together, their bare authority is by no means sufficient to oblige any other person to believe as they believed.—The truth of things depends not upon the opinions of men, nor is to be voted and carried
by

by numbers, but must be proved by arguments drawn from the nature and reason of things, or from the plain declarations of Holy Scripture. The doctrines of men, when they are impartially and fairly examined, and compared with the doctrines of revelation, are too often found to be quite different, or two things; and this I take to be the case in regard to the doctrine of original corruption, according as it is understood by its advocates.—Great numbers, as you have intimated, I make no doubt, sincerely believe in such a doctrine—but, for my own part, I can see no such doctrine taught in the Scriptures of truth. Those passages you have mentioned are capable of another sense; for most of them are figurative expressions, and not to be understood in their strict literal sense, as a great many other texts are: for you must know, that all the parts of holy Scripture are not to be taken in a literal sense; for, on this footing, there is no doctrine so absurd and inconsistent, but what may be supported by Scripture; consequently, there is a necessity sometimes, and in some instances, for departing from a literal interpretation thereof.

The whole ~~thread~~, tenor, scope, connection, and ~~design~~ of the writer should always be considered and weighed ; and by this means we may attain to a knowledge of what the doctrines of revelation are.

You have alledged, as an argument in favour of original corruption, the errors and follies of men, and the greatness and prevalence of sin and wickedness in the world ; but this, in my humble opinion, will do you no service in supporting the doctrine you contend for. All the different methods and fashions of sinning against God, is rather a proof on the other side of the question.—The different methods and ways of sinning against God, at different times and places, strongly prove the different inventions and wicked designs of men, since the first offence, and that it cannot, in the nature and reason of things, be ascribed to Adam's sin, or to any original taint. “ Sinful habits may be contracted, (saith Mr. Ibbot) by repeated acts of sin, and our nature be corrupted this way ; but the first sin of Adam was but one single transgression, and could at most produce but a sinful disposition in him ; it could not produce
a sinful

a sinful habit in him, much less in his posterity. Indeed it is difficult to conceive how it could affect them at all. And therefore, since the corruption of human nature can be plainly accounted for otherwise, we have no reason to admit of such an unintelligible solution, and fetch his corruption as far as from Adam's sin, when we may sooner find it in the voluntary wickedness of his posterity.

Though concupiscence be derived from parents to their children, yet there is no occasion to seek for this as far as in Adam : —the succeeding intermediate parents might transmit this, whether they had it from Adam or no : and if they had this from Adam, it cannot be ascribed to original corruption, or be looked upon as any part of it, because it is plain that this concupiscence was in Adam before his fall, and was the occasion of it ; and that which was the cause, could not be the effect of the same thing. If he had not an appetite and an inclination to forbidden things, he had been free from this temptation, and never have been drawn into this sin. This concupiscence, then, being in man before he fell,

cannot be ascribed to any corruption he contracted by his fall : he could not be corrupted before he was so ; nor was there any thing criminal in this concupiscence ; for though our first parents had desired the forbidden fruit, yet if they had abstained from it, they had not transgressed the divine command ; which did not forbid the bare desire, but the actual eating it ; nor were their natures corrupted by this transgression ; they were not hereby deprived of any of their natural perfections with which they were created.—They were indeed deprived of those gracious privileges which they then enjoyed, and which God farther designed them ; but these were such as by their own natural strength they could never have arrived at, and had no reason to expect, but from acts of mere grace and favour in God.—But this cannot properly be called a corruption of human nature ; it is only divesting it of some things, which though it once had, did never naturally belong to it.—

—If, besides this, there be any other corruption of our nature of a moral kind, which is commonly alledged, it is not equal in all men ; in some it is more, in others less.—

less.—In some men it is overcome by timely care and due study, and might be so in others. It appears and shews itself differently in different persons, and is neither uniform nor universal; upon all which accounts it is evident, that it does not, by any natural and physical efficacy, derive itself from Adam, as the shape and features, the air and mien of children are derived to them from their fathers *.”

If it be farther alledged, that while Adam was in a state of innocency, he might have preserved himself so, and was in a capacity not to have sinned at all, which no man now can possibly pretend to :

Now admitting the truth and force of this objection, it will not detract any thing from the reason or understanding of men. The plain truth of the whole matter is this: Adam, while he was in a state of innocency, had but one temptation to surmount, which if he had overcome, he would have had the privilege to have had recourse to the tree of life, which was designed to have strengthened the faculties both of his body and soul—but

* See Sermon v. page 145.

as he did not withstand and overcome the first trial or temptation, he was turned out of paradise, and became subject to more temptations, arising from the difficulties and troubles of human life ; and in this state of troubles and temptations were all his posterity involved. We are now subject to greater, and surrounded with more temptations, than what Adam was before he fell, and consequently the chance or hazard is now much greater than what his was ; so that we may truly say, that it is morally impossible for any man to live free from all moral defects ; and yet, under all the various trials and temptations of this present state, there have been great numbers of men who have lived pious, holy, and virtuous lives ; the truth of which you cannot question, when you hear the word of truth declare, that many “ through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained “ promises, stopped the mouths of lions— “ quenched the violence of fire, escaped “ the edge of the sword, out of weakness “ were made strong—waxed valiant in fight, “ and turned to flight the armies of the “ aliens. These were they of whom the “ world

“ world was not worthy, and yet by their
 “ unshaken faith, patience, and heroic vir-
 “ tue, obtained a good report.—Where-
 “ fore seeing” (saith the apostle) “ we are
 “ also encompassed about with so great a
 “ cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every
 “ weight, and the sin that doth so easily be-
 “ fet us.”

Thus the apostle here, as well as in all
 other exhortations to the exercise of our
 reason, supposes we can, and are capable of,
 reasoning and judging even in this state of cor-
 ruption ; otherwise he calls upon christians to
 “ lay aside every weight,” to no purpose ; for
 all the several exhortations and reproofs in
 the Scriptures, those delivered by Moses
 and the prophets, our Saviour and his
 apostles, are directed to men who lived af-
 ter the fall, and in this supposed state of
 corruption of human reason.

It still remains to be considered, whether
 we can exercise our reason with the same
 freedom now as Adam could in a state of
 innocency.—The writer that I have before
 mentioned says, “ That it is hardly to be
 supposed, and impossible to be proved, that
 man’s faculties, either of soul or body, were
 so

so impaired by the fall, that they now are unable to perform their several offices, and answer the end for which they were designed.—The feet can still walk, and the hands handle, and all the organs of the body can still perform their several functions.—And so it is with the faculties of the soul: the memory is still able to retain what is committed to it; the understanding to discern and judge between truth and falsehood, good and evil; and the will to chuse the one, and refuse the other. And that men take themselves to be thus capable of these several employments, appears from their using these faculties to these purposes; which would be vain and insignificant, if they were incapable of answering these ends.”

From hence I would just observe to you, that in my humble opinion, the doctrine of original corruption has no manner of foundation in reason; that the present corruption of manners, and wickedness in the world, is not to be ascribed to an original depravity of nature, but to a voluntary abuse and a misapplication of the powers and affections belonging to the human constitution; and that the greatest imperfections and deformities

ties of nature, and the misery of this life, chiefly arises either from the nature of an imperfect state, or from mens own personal wickedness ; and besides, the great violations of the law of God, and the prevalency of wickedness in the world, is no rule and standard for us to judge and determine by, of the truth and certainty of an original depravity of nature.—This doctrine may be true or false, independent of the common practice of men. The truth of things is not to be measured and depended upon by the judgment men make, or by the rules and measure of their conduct ; for if open infidelity was the established religion of a nation, or if all the world was to deny the being and providence of God, and the truth of his word, this would not destroy the maker and governor of the world, or make void the truth of revelation.—The works of nature, the regular and harmonious operations of providence, will be constant and everlasting proofs of the existence of a Deity, whatsoever men may say to the contrary ; and notwithstanding all the disputes about the truth of revelation, “ the foundation of
 “ God standeth sure.” The terms of the
 gospel

gospel covenant are so plain and express, that it is impossible, and out of the power of all the disputers of this world, to make them stand upon an uncertainty, or render them ineffectual.—If any man build upon this foundation, erroneous and inconsistent doctrine, this does not make the real doctrines of christianity at all dubious, or in the least endanger their foundation; for if men dispute to eternal ages, and call every thing into question which can bear a dispute, there will be many points in christianity, and those too of the highest importance, which will not bear any controversy at all, and which have no difficulty of being understood, but are level to the very meanest capacity; such as, repentance from dead (or wicked) works, faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and believing that he came from God, and brought a revelation of his Father's will; and that God has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by our Lord Jesus Christ, and reward every man according to his deeds; and of consequence, sobriety, temperance, charity, benevolence, piety, and universal goodness, must be an absolute qualification
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for eternal life and happiness. These plain principles of revealed religion can never be made uncertain by all the disputes in the world, nor can they be overturned or cancelled by wicked men or devils ; this being
 “ the foundation of God, which standeth
 “ sure, having this seal, the Lord know-
 “ eth them that are his ; and let every one
 “ that nameth the name of Christ depart
 “ from iniquity.”—Apply this reasoning to our present subject : let us suppose that all men, or the greatest part, live wicked and bad lives ; this does not prove the doctrine of original depravity, no more than mens denying the existence of a first Cause prove there is no such thing, nor yet prove that there is no difference between good and evil, or that, because men live wickedly, there never was, nor can be, any otherwise than wicked ; and if there be but few that do live righteous and pious lives, and we have God’s own declaration that some have been owned by him as such, and notwithstanding the prevalency of wickedness, we have good reason to believe there be now many good and pious men, and consequently the doctrine of universal corruption, derived or entailed

tailed upon men from the fall and sin of Adam, cannot be true ; nor no such doctrine, I am fully satisfied, is to be found in the plain parts of Scripture ; it is the sound of the text, and figurative expressions that are commonly referred to ; those which you have mentioned I shall now proceed to consider.

The first and second texts are, Psalms li. 5. lviii. 3. “ Behold I was shapen in wickedness, and in sin hath my mother conceived me.”—“ The ungodly are froward from their mother’s womb, as soon as they are born they go astray, and speak lies.”—But neither of these texts can possibly be understood of an original corruption, which is universally spread over the whole race of mankind.

The first words are the psalmist’s own case, and cannot have a reference to all mankind ; neither does he say of himself that he was a sinner before he was born ; he only says, that he was “ shapen and “ conceived in sin and wickedness ;” — he does not say he was made a composition of sin—he must know better than that ; he either might mean, that his mother was a
sinner,

finner, or that it was a wicked generation when he was first conceived in the womb, or else he might mean, that as he himself had been a great finner, he condemns himself, or aggravates his own case, by this figurative way of expression, that "it seems as if I had been a finner from my mother's womb."

The other passage, where it is said, that "children, as soon as they are born, go astray, telling lies,"—cannot be understood in a literal sense; because it is impossible that they should tell lies before they can speak.—The true sense, therefore, of the words must be, the early and strong inclination to sin and wickedness, arising from a very corrupt or evil communication and conversation, which has a direct tendency not only to spoil good-manners, but innocence itself.

We are not born with vices, or with virtues, but in a capacity for either. Besides, if "sinners from the womb, and going astray as soon as they are born," must (as you say it must) be meant something innate and original, by the same way of arguing, and the very same proofs will make virtue

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innate and original. Let one instance suffice, which we have in Psalm xxii. 9, 10. ver. " But thou art he that took me out of
 " the womb: thou didst make me hope
 " when I was upon my mother's breast."

The next passage, *Rom. v. 19.*—the apostle says, " that by one man's disobedience
 " many were made sinners:" which words do not mean, that we have all sinned in Adam, because no man can be made a sinner but by his own consent and voluntary choice; " where there is no law, there
 " is no transgression;" and no law can take hold of the sinner till he has sinned; or in other words, the subjects of law must be in being, before the law can be put into execution against them; and as we, who are the descendents of Adam, were not in being till after he had sinned, we cannot be sinners or transgressors of that law which was given to him, before we were made acquainted with it.—The " many" therefore, that are " made
 " sinners, by the disobedience of one man," are not made actual sinners, but only treated as sinners, or otherwise put into a state of trial, temptation, and affliction, and subject to sin and death.

Again,

Again, chap. vii. ver. 3. of this epistle,
 “ I see another law in my members, war-
 “ ring against the law of my mind, and
 “ bringing me into captivity to the law of
 “ sin.”—It is very remarkable in this pas-
 sage, that this “ law in his members” is
 not said to be derived from Adam, or to be
 a natural law; so that it seems to me not
 to concern the present question.—It is true,
 men may bring such a law as the apostle
 here speaks of upon themselves, by vicious
 habits and customs.

The last passage which you have alledged
 in favour of this original corruption of our
 nature, is in *Eph.* ii. 3.—where the apostle
 says, “ we were by nature the children of
 “ wrath, even as others :” and here again the
 apostle wisely guards against original depravity
 of nature :—he does not say that we *are* all by
 nature the children of wrath, but only says,
 that we *were* so, or that this *was* the case
 or unhappy condition of the Ephesians : they
 had, by vicious habits and customs, acquired
 a second or super-induced nature—they had,
 by actual sin, made themselves, as all other
 sinners do, “ children of wrath,” or liable
 to punishment.—“ But if the apostle, by

“ *nature*, meant what is usually meant by
 “ that word, in a strict and literal sense,
 “ this was not the Ephesians fault, but the
 “ fault of him who made them such, and
 “ was not only the case of the Ephesians,
 “ but of all others *.”

But in whatever sense we take the words,
 we cannot think, that the moment we are
 born we are so depraved and corrupted as to
 be unfit for any thing but hell and damna-
 tion. The Scripture gives a better account
 of children, and declares them naturally in-
 nocent ; for our Saviour tells us, that “ of
 “ such is the kingdom of heaven.”—Some
 men indeed seem to pay but little regard to
 the declarations of our Saviour, but they
 seem rather to take pride in declaiming
 against nature. “ But I apprehend (says
 Dr. Lardner) it much better or truer humi-
 lity, for a man seriously and sincerely, without
 reserve, to confess all his sins, in thought,
 word, or deed, against God and his neigh-
 bour. The former is only an acknowledg-
 ment of supposed corruption, common to
 all, and may be attended with spiritual pride,

* See Ibbot's Sermon v. p. 157.

and scornful disdain of others ; but to confess sincerely all our own sins and faults, is true humility.”—This humility is a virtue in such creatures as we are, and the ground of other virtues : it is also acceptable to God ; “ and whosoever confesseth and forsaketh “ his sins, shall have mercy.”

Let this suffice ; and may the grace of God guide us both into all necessary truth.—
Amen.

CONCLUSION.

DIALOGUE THE FOURTH.

MODERN CHRISTIAN.

I Sincerely thank you, my good Sir, for the labour and pains you have taken to set those passages of Scripture in a clear light, which I laid before you; and I must acknowledge, that the arguments which you have drawn from them, are so just, plain, rational, and consistent, that I shall make no reply to them. But as this may be the last time of our conversing together upon religious subjects in this way, I shall take the liberty to trouble you with a question of the greatest importance—a question which you and I, and all the world, are deeply concerned in, and which all christians in particular ought to consider of. In the mean time, give me leave to observe, that conversation upon religious subjects, when it is in the spirit of meekness, love, and charity, may
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be of infinite service, especially to persons who have not been accustomed to it, and have not entered into the spirit of christianity; for some christians, it is to be feared, do not think much about religion; heaven and happiness, and the realms of future glory, is what they have but faint ideas of, or relish to; and the reason why they have no better notions about it may be, for want of instruction and religious conversation.—If eternity, and the happiness of our souls, be of any importance to us, we ought not to neglect and forget the most momentous question of all, “What shall I do to be saved?”—And when we ourselves enter into the spirit of religion, when we have a real love for, and see the worth of our own souls, we shall not rest satisfied with the bare knowledge of the terms of our future acceptance, but we shall also rejoice to see the knowledge of virtue and religion in others; we shall endeavour to revive a religious and heavenly conversation, by “instructing the ignorant, “warning the unruly, comforting the feeble “mind, bearing with the infirmities of the “weak, so fulfilling the royal law of love;”

managing the whole of our conversation so, that it may tend to godly edifying.—To promote the knowledge, love, and fear of God, will be the main bent and tendency of our conversation, if we have a sincere regard to the happiness of others; and every faithful minister of the gospel, and all true christians, will “rejoice with joy unspeakable, “and full of glory,” to think of the vast number and multitude that will share in and possess heavenly glory.—“For what is our “hope and crown of rejoicing?” saith the apostle: “are not ye in the presence of our “Lord Jesus Christ, at his coming; for ye “are our glory and joy.”—All faithful pastors of Christ, and their flock, who are real christians, shall rejoice together; perfect, transcendent, and undivided bliss, will they enjoy, without any jealousy, envy, strife, or contention.—Undissembled joy, love, and harmony, and raptures of transport, praise, and love, shall reign universal.

Oh! my good Sir, whatsoever our differences may now be, let us, in the spirit of love and meekness, endeavour to remove it.—Let us take care not to employ our minds about mere speculative points, to the neglect
of

of the one thing needful ; but let us rather, with all our might, strive after a knowledge of the terms and conditions proposed in the gospel for our future acceptance. I shall now beg of you to point out and describe to me the faith of a rational and real christian, and the grounds, evidence, hopes, and assurance, of his title to the crown of future glory.

PRIMITIVE CHRISTIAN.

According to your desire, I shall endeavour to give you my thoughts upon the question which you have proposed, (viz.)—to describe the faith of a rational or sincere christian, together with considering his interest in Christ, and title to eternal rewards ; or in other words, the grounds and degrees of assurance of his future acceptance.

First,—A rational christian is one that believes in one Supreme Deity, who is the creator, governor, and preserver of the whole system of universal nature.—He believes this Being to be possessed of all possible perfection and excellency : he has the most exalted and enlarged conceptions of this Being ;
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he believes him to be all-powerful, infinite in wisdom, mercy, and goodness, and that he is the indulgent and compassionate father of all intelligent creatures, the author and eternal source of all goodness, and the bestower of every blessing ; he furthermore believes, that God is a Spirit, infinitely pure, holy, just, and true,—that he is a great friend and patron of piety and virtue, and an enemy to all wickedness, a rewarder of all them that diligently seek him ; and with the psalmist says, “ The Lord God is a sun “ and shield, the Lord will give grace and “ glory, and that no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.”—He also believes, that God is from all everlasting to everlasting ; that he is every where present ; that nothing escapes his knowledge ; and that he exercises an universal providence over all his works ;—that the righteous in particular are the objects of his especial providence, and interested in a more especial manner in his favour. These are the sentiments of a rational and pious christian, concerning the Supreme Being : he believes it is essential to true and rational religion,

ligion, to entertain such noble and enlarged thoughts of him.

Secondly,—He believes, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, “ the only begotten of “ the Father,” the first and greatest of all created beings, the Messiah and Saviour of the world ; he believes with a holy apostle, that the Lord Jesus, “ who though he was “ rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that “ we through his poverty might be made “ rich ;” that he is the author and finisher of the christian’s faith—the revealer of the Father’s will—by whom life and immortality is brought to light ; that he, by the appointment of the Father, is to be judge of quick and dead.—He also believes, that through (or by means of) Christ, all men are put into a saved state, or the way to salvation—that God has not appointed any one to wrath, but to obtain salvation by Jesus Christ—that he died for the just and unjust—that he might bring all men to God—that Christ calls and invites all men to believe and obey the gospel—“ that God is no “ respecter of persons, but in every nation “ he that fears him, and works righteousness, shall be accepted :” which leads me
to

to the next thing, to consider the grounds, evidence, or degrees of assurance, which a rational and sincere christian has of his future reward.

No man who hath worthy sentiments of the Supreme Being, as the just, wise, and merciful ruler of his reasonable creatures, can doubt, or in the least question, that God will fail in fulfilling and performing those promises of future happiness which he has promised to his people in the gospel of his Son.—“ He is faithful who hath promised.”—God, that cannot lie, hath promised.—Every man who seriously reflects on the whole of his own state, will find himself such a monument of divine mercy, that he will be encouraged to depend on the future promises of God.—So that every sincere christian may be assured in his own mind, that he cannot be disappointed or disinherited of the reward of eternal life.—“ God will not fail to perform what he has promised. He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” We may, with the greatest safety, security, and dependence, put all our trust and confidence in the supreme,
mer-

merciful, and propitious governor of the universe—he will not forget our labour of love, he will freely give the reward of eternal life.— This is what every sincere christian is, by his profession, led firmly to believe—he has sufficient evidence and assurance of it, to support him under all the trials of this life—he has hope and strong consolation in the veracity and immutability of God, that cannot deny himself.—But then, secondly, what are the grounds and evidences of a rational christian's own interest in, and title to, future happiness?—What degrees of assurance has he for his own acceptance?—Can he arrive to a certain knowledge that he shall be an object of divine approbation?—What is it founded upon?—Is it in the bare knowledge of the propitiousness of God? or is it a firm reliance in the merits of a Redeemer, or a faith on the merciful dispensation of the gospel?—No; a rational christian does not rest here.—Faith and knowledge, he knows, may fail; “ the hope of a hypocrite is as thin as a spider's web—he knows of no such mercy in God, nor merits in Christ, nor of such a dispensation of grace, as gives any encouragement, right, title, claim, or so much

much as any hope, for wilful impenitent sinners, for future acceptance.—He knows, that impenitent and irreclaimable sinners are such as the merciful Saviour and Judge of the world will bid “depart from me—I “know you not.”—He knows, that every habitual sinner, before he can read his title to future glory, must repent, reform, and forsake all his wicked ways—he must for ever despair of mercy and future acceptance, while he remains a servant to sin and the devil.—He must part with his beloved vices, before he can have any interest in the future reward; and not only so, but he must abound in “virtue, temperance, patience, “godliness, brotherly-kindness, and charity.”

The practice of these virtues are standing rules or marks of a rational and sincere christian, and it is that which will give him boldness or confidence in the day of judgment, and it is what our Saviour himself tells us are the standing rules of life which will bring us to heaven.—The keeping the commandments of God, doing his will, is constantly made the express terms and conditions of our admission into heaven.—“If
“thou

" thou wilt enter into life, keep the com-
 " mandments."—" This condition (says an
 author I have before mentioned) is, in
 the plain nature and reason of the thing, as
 necessary now under the gospel, as it was
 under the Law of Moses, or in a state of
 nature. When men had nothing but the
 light of reason and natural conscience to di-
 rect them, the doing the will of God, and
 obeying his commandments, always was,
 and always will be the way to recommend
 ourselves to his favour and acceptance.—
 " Now, this is the will of God, even our
 " sanctification."—The commandment is
 holy, just, and good, and relates to the con-
 duct of our lives and actions in the ways of
 righteousness.—This eternal law of univer-
 sal right is so agreeable to the purity of
 God's nature, and to the constitution of
 man as he is a reasonable creature, that the
 duties arising from it are of perpetual obli-
 gation—nor can any rule or precept belong-
 ing to it be taken away or dispensed with,
 without changing the nature of things,
 overturning the measures of right and wrong,
 and thereby introducing and authorizing ir-
 regularity, confusion, and disorder in the
 world ;

world ;—and we may be sure that Christ's coming into the world was not for such an end as this, but on the contrary, to reform the corrupt state of degenerate man, and out of those who would mend their lives, and “ bring forth fruit meet for repentance,” to erect a new kingdom, “ to purify unto himself a holy nation, a peculiar people, zealous of good works.”—He then that would have a well-grounded persuasion, and any animating and cheering hopes of acceptance, must have honesty, and conscious integrity ; “ for if our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God ;” and as Christ has made obedience to his commandments, and doing the will of his Father, the express condition of our entering into the kingdom of heaven, we must do it universally—a partial obedience will never please him.—To single out some of his commandments, which we will obey, because they do not interfere with a favourite vice, or some present interest, whilst we either obstinately or carelessly neglect others as plainly declared to us, this is to rebel against God, and slighting the authority of his word.—But suppose some
christian

christian should think otherwise, and lay no stress upon a good, moral and virtuous life, nor yet see no necessity for recommending obedience to the commands of Christ for acceptance; suppose they should lay the whole stress upon a perfect righteousness and obedience of Christ, and that he has made a compleat satisfaction:—to this I will beg leave to ask, whether Christ did not know what would fit men for heaven, when he told them so many times over, that “if they would enter into life, they must keep his commands, and do the will of God.” If his righteousness and obedience was to be imputed to them, and would do, and fit them for divine acceptance, without any of theirs, or keeping any of his commands, why did he fail to tell his disciples of this? How came he to tell them something else was the way to life?—Besides, how can they be called preachers of Christ, if they neglect preaching and recommending the commands of Christ?—In my humble opinion, they are the best christians, who live the best lives, and imitate the righteousness and holiness of Christ the nearest; and the true preachers of Christ are those who

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preach

preach his commands and doctrine, and obey
 it—and it is such that must have the most
 rational evidence and grounds to the mercy
 of God, and an interest in Christ.—But
 perhaps you may farther enquire, “ Who
 “ then can be saved? If holiness be the
 “ way to life, and that no man can see the
 “ Lord without holiness, must we not all
 “ despair of seeing God? Is there any man
 “ upon earth, who doeth good, and sinneth
 “ not? any person but what fails in some
 “ respect or other, either in their duty to-
 “ wards God, their neighbour, or them-
 “ selves? If these three branches of holi-
 “ ness must be inseparably united, in order
 “ to salvation, what must offenders do, but
 “ despair and die? and then, where is there
 “ grace of God published in the gospel? or
 “ what need of a mediation and Saviour for
 “ such as are perfect?”——To this, says
 Dr. Benson, I would reply, that as we have
 all offended, more or less, this is a very pro-
 per question, and concerns us all so much,
 that it deserves a most careful answer;
 which, according to the Scripture, runs
 thus:—God created men intelligent beings,
 and moral agents, and gave them a law,
 which

which is in all things holy, reasonable, just, and good.—To this law men should strive to conform; and if any of them kept it perfectly, they would undoubtedly find acceptance with God.—But as in the present state, either through the strength and multitude of temptations, or our own weakness, ignorance, or rashness, we all come short of, or break the divine law, in some respect or other.—We can none of us hope for eternal life by the law of works, or the original constitution of perfect innocence; God, therefore, out of his free grace, and unmerited goodness, hath provided a Mediator, to recall us unto his ways, and has most mercifully promised salvation by or through him, upon terms suited to the state of fallen and offending creatures.—In this new covenant God hath graciously engaged, that “ whoever will confess and forsake his sins, “ shall undoubtedly find mercy;” and that this mercy will be conferred upon all pre- vailingly righteous persons, and all sincere penitents, through the mediation of Jesus Christ; who, in consequence of what he hath done, to promote the virtue and happiness of mankind, is constituted Lord and

Judge of all, and hath, particularly, power committed unto him, to raise the dead, and to bestow eternal life upon all his faithful disciples and followers.—Thus is Jesus Christ “ the propitiation for our sins, and “ the author of eternal salvation unto all “ those that obey him.”

Thus have I finished what I intended ; and may God prosper what has been said agreeable to truth. *Amen.*

F I N I S.

